Principles for Dramaturgy

The project that led to the writing of this book developed through a sequence of research encounters that took place in a variety of institutional frames for dance, theatre, and performance (university departments, research and residency centres, production houses, independent academies, and a squatted theatre) and throughout different parts of Europe — in Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Croatia, Greece, and Spain. In a series of two- or three-day workshops followed by public roundtable discussions, dramaturgical practice was explored from several perspectives, including the following: identifying dramaturgical tendencies (formal, aesthetic, structural) in contemporary performance; developing concepts and methodologies for performance making; examining feedback, critical and creative response as dramaturgical activity; pursuing dramaturgy as the creation of actions in artistic work; and devising working frames in dramaturgical processes with an awareness of their relation to institutional critique and their potential for producing social imaginings. For each workshop we prepared and facilitated anew different set-ups that would allow the participants and ourselves to delve into a practising of dramaturgy from the proposed perspective. Departing from the work that took place in these interconnected events, this section of the book starts by outlining three key principles that arose from critical reflection on the workshops and roundtable discussions: mobilizing questions, alienating, and commoning. The examination of these principles will lead us later on to discuss dramaturgy as a catalytic type of operation. Prior to their discussion, we will briefly outline how the workshops were conceived and organized, as well as the ways in which we draw on them here so as to subsequently develop our larger argument on dramaturgy as 'working on actions'.

While task-oriented, the workshops aimed to open a space for individual and collective work to occur starting from the projects that the participants were independently engaged in and wanted to further work on during the workshops. The first day usually focused on 'what is already there', in the sense that participants were given a framework in which to reflect on the relationship between their diverse practices and dramaturgy. The second and/or third day aimed to push participants' work further, often through techniques of distraction, distancing, and interruption. Individually and in groups we practised care and exchange through exercises of conceptualization, writing, and

composition, without, however, blending the diverse practices in the room or forcing collaboration in the sense of 'making with' someone whose materials and tools could be different from our own; rather, participants were encouraged to problematize, shift, disrupt, or interrogate one another, and in this way support their peers' working practices. Participants were thus invited to activate dramaturgical modi operandi: practising attentiveness to details and to decision-making while developing working methods for their (artistic) work with an understanding of the ways in which it is meant to be public (that is, to address and concern others as well).

Throughout this process our main intention has been to practice dramaturgy in different circumstances and under diverse conditions (political, social, economic, institutional), while positioning this practice within *and* outside the studio by constantly shifting attention and drawing circles that weave together artistic methodologies and socio-political concerns. On the one hand then, the project as a whole, just like this book, moved between and within artistic methods and socio-political enquiries, in order to explore ways in which we come to meet, exchange, work, and create together. On the other hand, it is important to underline that we consider this as a specifically arts practitioners' endeavour. Even if we did not articulate this as explicitly at the start of the project, it seems that at its heart has always been the question of how we may work dramaturgically today. We question the limits and possibilities, scope, and relevance of dramaturgy as a practice that is both artistic and socio-political by its very nature and in its implications. Hence the methodology of the overall project has not been one of developing a series of situations in which to practically test (pre-formulated) hypotheses and positions on dramaturgy inside and outside the studio. Similarly, the explorations, methods, modes, and means of working, or the range of interactive, interventionist, and interrogative tools that we developed, were not used as a way of arriving at a new definition of dramaturgical methodology, or an instrumental approach to producing or analysing performance work. Rather, the workshops and research exchanges we set up served as a means of identifying and defining key principles in the work of others and our own that inform our understanding of dramaturgy as we perceive its relevance today through a simultaneously artistic and socio-political lens.

For this reason, we will not be concerned here with capturing or reporting what went on in the workshops, but with detecting the main operations initiated through the practical tasks developed during the project, and with identifying the particular quality they brought to both our work and that of the participants. We therefore start by discussing three principles that emerged through the project and through which we will then propose dramaturgy as a catalytic operation that produces what we will describe as a process of working on actions. In the same way that the workshops did not aim to offer tools but frames for working dramaturgically, the book too presents these three interconnected principles as underlying and occurring from a series of dramaturgical tasks, rather than tools or methodologies for dramaturgy. Even if we sometimes refer to workshop tasks, points that were raised in the roundtable discussions, as well as others' practices, this is to help us unfold the details of each proposed principle rather than because such an instance encapsulates or demonstrates one of the discussed principles; in fact, it may be that more than one of these principles underlies a specific task that we refer to. Neither do we propose a practising of these principles in any particular order. Any reference to tasks and exercises in this sense is meant to facilitate a return to specific instances that reveal how our understanding of the proposed principles — namely, mobilizing questions, alienating, and commoning — stems from an engagement with processes of working on actions *in practice* and *with others*.

Mobilizing Questions

One simple rule: you always answer a question with a new question! If desired, a specific topic can be set in order to guide the line of questions.[1]

Inspired by the above instruction — through which a group of artists who participated in the project '6 MONTHS 1 LOCATION (6M1L)'[2] led a Skype conversation — in many workshops we invited participants to practice conversing as a group, through questions only. The task was to reply not *to* the question but *with* a question, which required focusing on what is at stake in the question being asked and thinking through how this question could be further questioned and taken forward. We often offered the starting question, setting the focus of the discussion in a way that was suitable to that particular workshop,[3] and practised for forty to forty-five minutes, to allow the group the time needed to get into a state of questioning, to start thinking through questions. Notably, we usually tried this task after participants had spent some time working individually, as a 'warm-up' to get us all tuned into the group before working together; in other words, this practice marked the passage from individual work to togetherness, the overall aim being to start *thinking together in questions*. Similarly, we sometimes proposed that participants interview either one another or themselves (self-interview), paying particular attention to the kinds of questions they would ask in order to detect the dramaturgical in their practice, from whichever perspective they work (as, for instance, artists, writers, dramaturgs, curators, or pedagogues). There are at least two aspects that interest us here, and that form the basis of the principle of mobilizing questions, through which we propose that a certain type of dramaturgical practice may function: first, the articulation of questions that have a capacity to mobilize a process and, second, the mobilization of questions themselves through certain dramaturgical operations. In this sense, we conceive of dramaturgy not as the mere formulation and asking of questions, but as a process that works with questions as its actual material and in this way triggers their very mobilization. In other words, we understand the activity of dramaturgy as the 'motor' that makes questions appear, while such questions also function to activate the work itself. Furthermore, as we will show, we consider both these two understandings of the principle as potentially connected to exercising modes of togetherness.

The practice and purpose of questioning in processes of performance making is undoubtedly not something new. This is probably related to the ways in which uncertainty, un-knowing, and doubt have been foregrounded as significant, or even desirable qualities in creative processes.[4] And, as we shall see, questions and acts of questioning have also appeared as materials in performance works themselves. At the same time, the notions of togetherness, collaboration, and cooperation have also been at the forefront of discourses on performance and beyond,[5] even though the meaningfulness and validity of such terms have likewise been questioned.[6] While we will return to this latter set of terms as part of the third principle proposed in this section —

that of commoning — a brief reference here to examples that have brought questioning to the foreground of artistic creation helps demonstrate how the principle of mobilizing questions builds on and to some extent departs from these propositions; our aim is to show how we may understand such a principle as proposing a type of *dramaturgical thinking*, but also as seeking to establish *new relations* between the agents involved in an artistic process, as well as between such agents and the work itself.

A key example to look at here is Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema's work *Weak Dance Strong Questions* (2001). This dance performance takes the form of an improvisation, where the two men attempt to dance questions, or else to ask questions by moving — asking question after question, questioning continuously, as they say.[7] Usefully, Bojana Cvejić clarifies that after a series of rehearsals, the two artists changed their focus, from dancing questions, to dancing 'in the state of questioning, which is itself not doubted', in other words 'bringing their bodies to a state in which they make the movement question itself through itself'.[8] Although from a different perspective, one could argue that Deborah Hay's practice of practising a hypothetical 'What if...?' question is not dissimilar.[9] Rather than asking the dancer to move to the question, she asks that the question informs the overall state of the performer whatever action they may be doing.

Both of these two artistic experiments are referred to here not because they exemplify a specific type of dramaturgical approach, but because they already hint at an important distinction with regard to the practice of questioning in performance that is relevant when looking at its function within dramaturgical practice as well. It is perhaps a common understanding that, as a practice, dramaturgy involves asking lots of questions; the dramaturg, for example, questions decisions, actions, stagings, intentions, and through a dialogue with the maker and other collaborators, seeks to unpack the logical connections, necessities, and discrepancies in such artistic choices. But in this case, we would further need to ask: What kinds of questions does dramaturgy ask? How are they formulated? Are there more or less 'useful' questions to ask? Moreover, is there an expectation here that such questions aim at specific answers? And what kinds of actions would such questions produce as part of a process and in the work itself? How would one ask questions? And how would that activate a process? Already in this understanding there is

an underlying assumption that questioning in and of itself leads to a desired result, something inherently 'good' that dramaturgy helps the process get to, the unveiling of the work perhaps. Similarly, this approach could run the danger of fetishizing uncertainty, the search for the unknown, or even an aesthetics of failure, an image of productive confusion brought about as a result of constant questioning.[10] It is worth then returning here to Burrows and Ritsema's distinction between 'dancing questions' and dancing 'the state of questioning which itself is not doubted'. Instead of considering a practice of asking questions as a way to find answers, or as perpetual questioning for its own sake, could we instead imagine questioning as an active type of practice, whose certainty and clarity gives it a mobilizing force? In this case, it would be possible to even depart from the precise form of asking questions and instead opt for any mode of doing that exercises a state of questioning *as an attitude*, not necessarily within one's performative actions only (as is the case with Burrows and Ritsema), but within any kind of actions involved in the making process (including that of thinking).

When coining the term 'the ignorant dramaturg', Cvejić already departed from the problematic understanding of the dramaturg as someone who observes a process from the outside and has the right questions to ask that will 'improve' or 'fix' the work, the one who 'knows better', and who can predict how the audience will react to a performance.[11] Instead, she has proposed the figure of the dramaturg as the 'co-creator of a problem' and explained that a problem in this case produces a methodology of inventing constraints that will act as enabling conditions for the work to be created.[12] Furthermore, she has argued:

> As questioning nowadays is a domesticated and worn out truism about almost any intellectual activity, questions by which a problem is posed are distinguished by the answers that they give rise to. So the problem is measured by the solution it merits — if this solution is an invention that brings into being something new, to what did not exist or what might never have happened.[13]

In this sense, for Cvejić, raising a problem implies the construction of terms in which the problem will be stated, but also the conditions in which it will be solved. Herein, however,

lies another distinction we would like to draw in relation to the principle of mobilizing questions as we mean it here. In Cvejić's proposition, there is still some emphasis placed upon the arrival at a resolution of the problem through performance. Questions here work to 'slowly eliminate the known possibilities to enable the production of a qualitatively new problem', 'a new dispositive', as she has claimed.[14] The posing of the problem therefore works as a speculation, as she further suggests, which will lead to a future-perfect tense of a performance, a 'will have had'.[15] Instead, mobilizing questions opens up a space by problematizing and does not expect or anticipate a resolution, even though it may produce both actions, and the conditions in which such actions take place. In a way, Cvejić is primarily concerned with the ways in which (choreographic) problems shape a performance, whereas we would like to draw attention here to the activity of mobilizing questions itself, as part of dramaturgical practice, and regardless of whether and how such a practice may lead to a performance outcome.

Notably, after practising conversing in questions in workshops, participants would often be in a position to recall the moments when the questions had produced new thought and when the task had 'failed'. Dramaturgy, we would argue, emerged when a space for thought was opened up through a process of multiplying or exhausting questions that created a shift. In this case, the questions seemed to activate a process of thinking together, rather than presenting us with a need to answer. Without turning into an exhaustive list created through association, they generated a forward movement, not a lateral or horizontal movement, such as the one we would describe as taking place in brainstorming, for example. Such a movement of thought suggests a particular kind of action that has a specific direction, even though it neither reaches towards a resolution, nor exhausts itself in doubting.[16] Hence the mobilization of questions that we propose as a practice creates, frames, and expands the grounds on which action can take place. In fact, we would suggest that in performance this ground includes the spectator, so that they too are invited to follow the movement from one thought to the next, from one action to the next.

Finally, we would like to suggest that, whereas the process of asking, posing, or answering questions may belong to someone (an author, whether dramaturg or other), mobilizing questions

does not (and cannot) belong to anyone by its very nature as a directed movement of thought. Rather, by practising it one comes to disown one's thinking; such challenging of individual authorship does not only lead to a proposition about co-authorship, but allows the work to author itself, to think in its own terms, as it were. This could be an instantiation of what Maaike Bleeker has described as 'thinking no-one's thought', a notion that she has proposed as a general mode of dramaturgical work and to which we shall return again later.[17] Here she understands thinking as 'a material practice that proceeds through enactment', that emerges 'through something that mediates between the people involved' but also 'between people and things'.[18] We would further suggest then that 'thinking no-one's thought' could be achieved through specific (material) practices of disowning and therefore opening up images, tasks, solutions, imaginations. Interestingly, albeit from a different perspective, physicist David Bohm has proposed a form of collective dialogue that seems to be aimed at precisely what Bleeker describes: a 'stream of meaning' between people thinking together, which is capable of producing a collective movement of values, meanings, and intentions.[19] The necessity for such a practice arises, in his view, out of the need for us to identify 'systemic faults' in thinking, given that, as he has claimed, thought doesn't know it is doing something and then struggles against what it is doing.[20] In other words, Bohm has stressed that thinking is already doing and that we need to train producing flows of meaning together, so as to reach the possibility of direct insight that a collective moment of thought can achieve. As physicist Nichol Lee has further noted, while we often associate insight with the 'a-ha!' phenomenon of having suddenly grasped the significance of some puzzle or problem, and even though Bohm does not necessarily exclude this type of instance, what is more interesting, however, is that he extends the notion of insight to a much more general, and generative, level of application, an 'active energy' that reorders thought processes themselves.[21]

And yet, there is nothing to suggest that this process of mobilizing questions and collectively disowning thought, as informed by Bleeker and Bohm, could not be pursued individually. One could read Nicola Conibere's contribution to this book, for example, as precisely that: a piece of writing that arose as if in an attempt to respond to a series of questions and then allowed itself to be further mobilized and disowned through

such questions. The text is an expanded version of a statement Conibere offered as part of a roundtable discussion that took place in London (September 2015), before which we had sent her a series of questions to consider. She started her presentation by admitting:

> Whilst it was clear that I did not have to answer all, or any, of these questions, each sent me reeling a little bit. And so, I found myself attempting to answer all of the questions, through a desire to find something like a complete answer to just one of them. This was a mistake, but it is what I have to share with you.[22]

Conibere's statement subsequently staged her attempt to respond to the questions, to approach them again, differently, and through this process to reveal the unfolding of shifting perspectives, a desire to engage with the task as someone or something else, renewing the task itself on the way. As is the case with her text published in this book, one senses here a sense of destabilization, what the author herself describes as 'a form of dramaturgical interference', as she starts writing in the first person, and then moves on to third-person female, followed by third-person male, and finishing in third-person plural. Interestingly enough, she finally suggests that all this thinking, shifting, and constant changing, is capable of producing a 'single form', even if that was not the initial intention. This reminds us of a claim by Hélène Cixous that a writer disowns,[23] which would suggest in this case that this kind of dramaturgical interference produced through the process of mobilizing questions does not resemble a mode of thinking that is one of pinning down an argument — or owning the resolution of a problem, to refer back to Cvejić — but is rather constantly disowning through further questioning. Depersonalizing dramaturgy in this way suggests that questions are to be found in the 'work' that is done, while at the same time it is the mobilization of such questions that produces further work. And it is in this way perhaps that the reader or, in the case of performance, the spectator, is invited to further mobilize the questions themselves and be mobilized by them — in other words, to allow the work to do its work and take them to that place of disowning, letting go of the 'a-ha!' moment in favour of a reordering of thought itself, in Bohm's terms.

Alienating

> *Divide into groups of four. One person from the group interviews a second person from the group about an artistic project the latter is currently working on and the dramaturgical aspects involved in it. A third person interrupts the interviewee regularly by giving her instructions to: start (a new sentence); replace (a word); close eyes; open eyes; reverse (the direction of her thoughts); pause; reduce (the number of words used); repeat; reposition (words in a different context); end. At the same time, the fourth person in the group notes words, terms, sentences, and ideas heard in the interview, that seem important for them and relate to the art project discussed, each one on a different Post-it. When done, this fourth person adds on separate Post-its their own thoughts, ideas, terms that came to mind while listening, before eventually offering all their notes to the interviewee. This lasts twelve to fifteen minutes. Then the people in the group change roles and start again.*[24]

Philosopher Miika Luoto has described the particularity of the work of art as something that 'stems from human activity but essentially exceeds that activity'.[25] This means that although it is of course one or more people who bring an artwork forth, this work cannot be conceived merely as the 'product' of their efforts. On the contrary, these efforts allow the coming forth of something else, according to Luoto. This 'something else' resides in the work itself and it is its own 'working', its own productivity.[26] On the one hand, thus, an artwork's existence is dependent on the creative practice initiated by those involved in it (such as makers, performers, and dramaturgs). On the other, the creativity of that practice and the final product that derives from it differ from the scope of its creators. It is in this sense, as Luoto has interestingly noted, that a work 'differs from itself' being creative and a beginning in itself.[27]

At the same time, André Lepecki has discussed tensions that derive among those '*who are supposed to hold knowledge*' over the work being created' (authors, makers, performers, dramaturgs), as opposed to the situation of artistic encounters wherein all collaborators work for the piece to come, without necessarily knowing what it truly is about, what it wants, or what it needs.[28]

And he has argued that a work *'owns its own authorial force'*.[29] It is for this reason that, according to Lepecki, dramaturgy should not be understood as a practice connected with notions such as knowledge, authorship, or ownership as may usually be the case. If dramaturgy is not conceived as a set of tools for 'knowing' in the service of the maker or any of the other collaborators, though, then how does it take place in the creative process? Or, as Lepecki has aptly put it, 'How does it inhabit this zone of indetermination that is nevertheless very precise, very concrete, and very rigorous?'[30] In order for dramaturgy to enter a zone of precise, concrete, and rigorous indetermination and *allow* the piece that no one knows to become actual, we should invent anew a mode of experimenting, a mode of rehearsing that will allow us to operate from 'a place of quasi-nothingness' the writer has posited.[31]

During the workshops that took place as part of the project 'Dramaturgy at Work', we became highly attentive to the abovementioned particularities of the artwork and aimed to delve deeper into possible ways to approach, understand, and work with its 'differing'. If, indeed, what is initiated in the frame of a creative process will always differ from what at some later point will be called the 'work' that derived from such a process, how can one move towards this work? If those involved in a creation will never know their work, since this will always exceed their scope, how can they act towards it, how can they relate to and work for it? Placing ideas such as those of Luoto and Lepecki at the centre of our dramaturgical concerns, however, does not mean arguing for the re-autonomization of an artwork that acts independently from its context and the people involved in it. In contrast to such modernist ideas, we rather wish to point to what is common in a work, what all collaborators share outside each one's distinct role and perspectives. In this sense we share Adrian Heathfield's understanding of dramaturgy as a common 'responsibility towards (and response to) that which is immanent in a given performance, its phenomena and forms of representation';[32] a movement distributed across the various performing agents in the room and across various theoretical, critical, and artistic thinking and operating modes — a movement across diverse disciplines and cultural sites, that does not belong to any one of them. In other words, we refer to an attentiveness, responsibility, and response to what emerges from *working together*.

Within this frame, we devised and suggested tasks for the workshops that would assist this working together and open up different kinds of spaces between the participants, their work, and the work of others. With tasks such as the one described above, we put forth a process of continuous transformation of each participant's project as it was developing. As a consequence, participants' understanding of what their work was or could be sometimes became more distant and others came closer to their initial thoughts and expectations. As others interrogated, interrupted, or documented in writing the principles of a participant's project, intervening and positioning themselves in relation to it, participants were (re)introduced to their own work through the eyes and projections of others. This process allowed one's project not to be changed necessarily, but certainly to be revisited and reimagined. In this way, the projects that participants decided to focus on during the workshops inhabited what Lepecki has called 'this zone of indetermination'; continuous and distracting directives made them precise but at the same time unfixed in one position alone. In order, thus, to sustain such elements of unpredictability and estrangement during the artistic process, we shall propose here the principle of 'alienating' as a crucial one for dramaturgy.

The notion of alienation is not new in the context of theatre. Bertolt Brecht was one of the first to use it as a key term in his work. Already in 1935, in his essay 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Theatre', he described it as an effort 'directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play'.[33] Spectators, according to Brecht, should not relate to the stage actions via the subconscious or any kind of empathy. For him, acceptance or rejection of these actions and utterances should take place only on a conscious level. Instead of limiting alienation to the audience's reception, considering it once more as a carefully constructed tool in the hands of those who 'know' (the director, the actor, the dramaturg), a tool used to address the ignorant spectator who has to think consciously, we suggest alienating working modes here as an important dramaturgical principle and concrete directive in the making of the artwork, too.

A significant question arises at this point: *How* can such alienation take place in one's own work? There are possibly many ways in which this can happen, which relate directly to the particular characteristics of each artistic project. Instead of

imposing concrete tasks or tools that can be applied anywhere, then, we would rather stress the importance of the presence of such processes of alienation in dramaturgical work, as a significant principle in itself. In effect, we shall also draw here on recent suggestions by Lepecki as well as theatre director Eugenio Barba, who proved to be highly influential for the way tasks connected to alienation and estrangement were approached and devised in the workshops. These ideas are also indicative of the diverse ways in which the alienation principle can be approached in different artistic frames depending on their distinct characteristics and needs.

Lepecki has proposed a methodology of work that draws on errancy, erring, and error as a dramaturgical mode related to not knowing and therefore capable of achieving the alienation that interests us here. His argument is that working via mistaken, incorrect, 'wrong' instructions or starting points can allow one to arrive at possibilities otherwise hidden or censored under the imperative of 'proper use'.[34] When talking about error, alienation, estranging, or not knowing as insightful forces in dramaturgical processes, however, we do not suggest an aesthetics of failing or failure as constitutive of the artwork (although failure's value is also often appreciated). The proposal is rather for developing 'broken compasses' that will misguide or misdirect, without revealing a 'proper' or 'expected' destination, allowing one to be lost, but still getting them somewhere; we therefore talk about finding ourselves in a state of 'not knowing where to go next, but nevertheless going'.[35] What happens in this way, to return to Lepecki, is that one challenges one's self with the terror of not knowing where to go, in order to escape another terror, which is actually even more frightening, that of not knowing how to help a work escape the cliché. Estranging one's self from one's own norms can help them remove the preconceived, established clichés that overflow a work even before it starts — clichés that relate to the way we think about what should be done, how, when, and with what outcome. Such alienation can be achieved in different ways depending on the specific dramaturgical actions each work employs. However, allowing the principle of alienation to affect a work means deciding to go for the 'bad advice', the 'wrong direction', the error, until something else, another glance, something possibly altogether different from what had originally been conceived starts to appear — until one's own clichés start to disappear and something *else* (in Luoto's words) starts to emerge.[36]

Barba has arrived at similar propositions, coming at it from another direction. For him, dramaturgy once more plays a significant role towards distilling into a work '*complex* relationships, capable of *overturning* the obvious ones'.[37] By highlighting the importance of relational aspects in a work, Barba has argued for a dramaturgy that dismisses whatever comes as 'evident' in it. Subsequently, it becomes a process that aims 'to shape, merge, multiply and then overturn the relationships' that establish themselves in one's work. In order to describe this process, Barba has aptly made use of the metaphor of the 'earthquake' that shakes things up, disarranges, and destroys logics revealing unforeseen threads, connections, and relationships.[38] The aim of this earthquake, according to Barba, is not so much to bring forth 'original' inventions but to provide a new potentiality of links and approaches different from those already existing, imagined, and imaginable until then. In the place of Lepecki's 'error', Barba has suggested the voluntary imposition of 'constraints' and 'restrictions' in an artistic process, which helps create such an 'earthquake', an act of forcing unplanned solutions that may lead the work elsewhere.[39] Although we mainly approached the notion of 'constraint' in our workshops in the sense of time-restrictions and the devising of rule-driven tasks (such as the ones mentioned earlier), we consider Barba's suggestion useful in pointing to modes that defamiliarize one with and alienate one from one's own work. We too then consider dramaturgy as capable of reversing facts, making them appear strange and difficult to identify, leading to the unrecognizable.[40] Once more in this case the terror of falling into a void where the parachute may not open, as Barba has wittily put it, is seen as preferable to the terror of giving into a 'proper' way of working. What is offered in return for such anguish certainly deserves the trouble, as it opens up one's work, letting go of the horizon of expectation, and allowing us instead to meet alterity. Or, in Barba's words, it has to do with encountering one's own work, 'seeing it approaching from far away, independent and with a proud life of its own'.[41]

And yet, while proposing similar processes to Lepecki and Barba on alienation and the related notions of unknowing and distracting as central dramaturgical principles, we are also highly aware of the complexities of today's working conditions in an accelerated appropriation system, where whatever one argues for can almost automatically be criticized as the 'new trend', leading

to contradictions that become deeply frustrating once one loses a position to defend. We could argue that neoliberalism knows how to co-opt and financialize any creative strategy appropriating every possible working mode with great speed. In this sense, 'not knowing' may become the new 'knowing' in discourses that argue for neo-hippie production modes that are meant to free up our creativity from earlier constraints, which supposedly commit us to specific processes or people instead of opening space for the 'unknown', the 'unexpected', or even the 'impossible'. As philosopher Paolo Virno has argued, 'a certain degree of autonomy or freedom is necessary' in today's production systems, given that a work organized directly by capitalism would not be a profitable one. He has noted that: 'to yield a profit and be useful from the perspective of the capitalist, the work needs to some extent to be established through self-organization'.[42] This easily translates as follows: one should feel encouraged today to not pay any attention to dominant knowledge that restricts one's creativity. One does not need 'to know'. By organizing autonomous, no-strings-attached processes of 'not-knowing', spaces where everything is possible and no commitments (personal but also social and political) are involved, one should feel free to do anything they want — and this is precisely so that clever neoliberal mechanisms can immediately turn such 'unknown', 'groundbreaking' work into a commodity and exploit it accordingly.

Within this frame, we would like to proceed against nihilist views that abolish (or respectively fetishize) either processes of 'knowing' or of 'not knowing' and move towards what we hope is a more carefully balanced proposal. According to our suggestion, 'something else' emerges in a work once the force of not knowing and the desire to know appear together — once we stop prioritizing, evaluating, or announcing the relevance of specific aspects in the work, and we instead become attentive to the diversity of the elements present in it and once we alienate ourselves from what it is that we are doing, in order to rediscover it anew each time. This is what drives the dramaturgical processes discussed here and is offered as a working principle. Instead of proceeding via binaries, then, our take on the dramaturgical function of the alienation principle aligns more with philosopher Richard Kearney's discussion of alienation as a process that subverts our established categories and challenges us to think again by threatening the known with the unknown.[43] Kearney has

posited that we should work beyond established ideas, already present since early Western thought, that equate the 'good' with notions of self-identity and sameness, and the 'evil' with notions of exteriority, otherness, and alterity that threaten the pure unity of the soul.[44] Instead of seeing strangeness as something that possesses one's most intimate being or as the alien that needs to be eradicated, the delicate balance between knowing and not knowing should be carefully reconsidered and worked with, Kearney has suggested. As he has accurately remarked, if something or someone becomes '*too transcendent*, they disappear off our radar screen and we lose all contact'.[45] We thus stop seeing them or even conceiving them as this or that thing, which means that we become unable to recognize, imagine, or narrate their alterity. On the other hand, if something or someone becomes too '*immanent*, they become equally exempt from ethical relation'.[46] In this case, they become indistinguishable from one's own self and we are again unable to see them, recognize them, or imagine them as different. It is for this reason that, for the philosopher, one should 'not let the foreign become *too* foreign or the familiar *too* familiar' but constantly try out a variety of crossings between the same and the other, that is, between knowing and not knowing.[47]

Kearney has taken his discussion on otherness even further by connecting it to Jacques Derrida's ideas on hospitality, revealing in this way the social and political implications of the issue. Derrida has declared that 'for pure hospitality or pure gift to occur there must be absolute surprise ... an opening without horizon of expectation ... to the newcomer *whoever that may be*'.[48] If one wishes to eliminate the possibility of the newcomer destroying their house, though, if one wishes to have absolute control on their actions and exclude terrible possibilities in advance, then one can never be hospitable, one can never really welcome someone or something. To truly embrace the other as stranger, then, is to accept a certain decentring of the ego, opening one's self to the novel, the incongruous, and the unexpected. Similarly, according to Kearney, in order to be able to rise to a poetics of new images and an ethics of new practices one has to suspend one's defence mechanisms against alterity.[49]

Betina Panagiotara, in the text that appears in this book, looks back at her participation in one of the workshops. She recalls presenting the way she works to the group and mentioning, among other things, that she always writes with her hair up as

this makes her feel more safe. When the presentation is done, another participant responds to her by giving her a note written in red capital letters, which instructs her to 'write with her hair loose'. Panagiotara keeps it on a noticeboard above her desk, and looks at it regularly as she works. And regardless of whether or not she does keep her hair up, she considers this note a recurring reminder of a dramaturgy that, as she describes it, generates doubts that make one shiver about one's practices and that intervene and mess up one's work — a dramaturgy that tickles one's curiosities, builds pathways, provokes dialogues, and doubts any overwhelmingly rational approach towards things and others.[50]

It is in a similar way that the principle of alienation is proposed here, as another reminder note that urges the one who works recurrently and in red capital letters to not be afraid of meeting the 'other' work that is on its way, to not be afraid of hosting it in one's creative processes: an urge that risks suspending defence mechanisms and embracing alienation — not too much, not too little — in order to give rise to a poetics of new images and an ethics of new practices, as Kearney suggested above. Not in the sense of the 'innovative' or the 'unseen/unheard before' but more of the unexpected and unfamiliar: the 'other'.

Commoning

- *Give a 'gift'[51] that can help him/her continue working. This gift should have a specific form. It can be, for example: a wrong instruction; a constraint; an action; a directive; a distraction; a question.*
- *Invent a metaphor that characterizes the way you work and describe it for two minutes to the other people in your group. They will then pose questions aiming to detect working modes, strategies, infrastructures, concerns, and challenges in how you work.*
- *Set-up an experiment that will help you 'test' an aspect of your project with others.[52]*

During the research project 'Dramaturgy at Work' we insisted on devising tasks that invite workshop participants to intervene, question, interfere, and engage with their own as much as with others' working processes, mobilizing a dramaturgical way of working *between many*. The aforementioned tasks are only a few

examples of what we tried out in the workshops, which manifest such a process of ongoing sharing and exchange. More specifically, the first one asks participants to respond to someone else's presentation of her working process by, in direct or indirect ways, proposing how that person can continue working. The second requires that one self-reflectively transpose her working processes onto an imaginative realm (that of metaphors), which others will need to join from their perspectives and think through in order to detect methods, infrastructures, and modes that are constitutive of one's way of working. And the third task points to a practice of setting up 'experiments' (for example, game structures, try-outs, and fragmented processes) that open up aspects of the project for others to critically and empirically engage and possibly interfere with. Over the course of the workshops, we namely suggested tasks that directly required appropriation of another's ideas, principles, and methods into one's own work or even more radical formats of working together through scores that derived from each one's artistic projects and were then used to create another single project together.[53] Through these tasks, participants were thus guided to a shared responsibility, engagement, and reconfiguration of one another's works, while these were still in a state of transformation.

Conceiving of exercises that activate ongoing processes of exchange between many parties and through which a state of unbelonging of projects and of ideas emerges, may not be unusual in the context of performance making.[54] It is, however, crucial to look at such processes from a dramaturgical perspective, which points to considering dramaturgy as a practice that puts the idea of plurality 'at work' during and in favour of the development of a specific project. In the context of 'Dramaturgy at Work', the aforementioned tasks were not originally meant to create a space of unbelonging and disowning one's own project, although this may have been one of the consequences. One of the principles that we (the editors) shared and that led to the conception of these tasks is that in order to work dramaturgically during an artistic process and to let an idea/project develop, one has to practice it in relation to others (people, sources, objects, and so forth). It is, hence, precisely the multiple ways of working between many that interested us, as well as the ways in which this proposition can be translated into practical tasks that can mobilize dramaturgical working processes.

When critically reflecting on this aspect of our take on dramaturgy, it appears that we have also been facilitating an articulation of what may be considered as 'commons' among everyone participating in a workshop. This is not to say that we were aiming towards isomorphism of projects and ideas. Rather, such tasks strived for a pluralized and differential process of communicating, working, imagining, and experimenting that makes possible the production of common practices, imaginings, and actions. It is this searching for, articulating, and possibly producing what is 'in common' that could thus be interpreted as a practice of commoning, which constitutes our third working principle for dramaturgy.

The writings about 'commons' by political theorist Isabell Lorey are at the backbone of our theoretical proposition here. Interestingly, Lorey has remarked that in the last decades the '*search* for commons (in order to constitute the political), has conspicuously taken place more often in art institutions than in social, political, or even academic contexts'.[55] Commonality does not mean homogeneity for Lorey, and she has specifically claimed that 'the search for commonality begins from differences and does not end in uniformity; rather, it is accompanied by permanent debates about what counts as the common'.[56] More significantly, Lorey has proposed to search for the commons in the various forms of precarization that humans share in the ways they work and relate with one another today. She has therefore discussed the notion of the 'commons' mainly from a social and political perspective, which is worthwhile to take note of and to then closely relate to the dramaturgical point of view that is herewith explored.

As Lorey has explained in her book *State of Insecurity*, the production of commons is crucial because different dimensions of the 'precarious' have been fused in today's neoliberal world and have led to a normalized state of governmental precarization and social isolation, which have become our shared mode of being and working. Starting with 'precariousness' as the socio-ontological dimension of human vulnerability that points to the constitutive aspect of human sociality and intra-dependence (in the sense that humans cannot survive without one another), and 'precarity' as the vulnerability of specific social groups that suffer from social inequality and are therefore more vulnerable than others (such as refugees and minorities), Lorey has introduced the notion of 'precarization' as more apt for describing today's state of affairs. The latter refers to the type of governmental precarization, that

is the continuous biopolitical security measures taken by the state in order to protect the socio-ontological human vulnerability.[57] However, as Lorey has shown, this appropriation of human vulnerability by governmental regimes produces inequalities as well as individualistic subjectivities. That is to say, those regimes assume to secure human vulnerability from (the 'dangerous') others and therefore refute social aspects of interdependence, which are otherwise at the core of human precarity. Hence, the state protects citizens from one another and at the same time upsurges techniques of self-government, which suggests a social mode of isolation and mistrust rather than of interdependence.[58]

In this context, Lorey has additionally suggested that current modes of working that are primarily founded on immateriality — that is, communication and affect — result in a type of production that is to a great extent impossible to manage by means of governmental regimes. She has namely stated that in 'processes of precarization, something unforeseen, contingent and also in this sense precarious arises'.[59] That is, an aspect of precarization that

> harbours the potential of refusal, producing at the same
> time a re-composition of work and life, of a sociality
> that is not in this way, not immediately, not so quickly,
> perhaps even not at all, capitalizable.[60]

Against this backdrop, how can we situate the 'commons' in the direct context of artistic processes, which are also founded on immateriality (that is, affect, experience, language, and movement) and are equally conditioned by regimes of precarity (for example, cuts, privatization, valorization of art on the basis of ticket sales, and temporary projects)? In order to move beyond the idea of an a priori existence of (ontological) commons, we suggest engaging with Lorey's approach again, as she argues that today commons need to first emerge and then be constituted within the state of precarization.[61] This is a crucial thesis, because it requires that we surpass binary assumptions about commonalities and differences, and rather engage in a 'search' that is guided by a certain degree of ignorance and investigates our social and political surroundings. Moving to the context of dramaturgy, we can specifically search for the commons in the apparatuses that aim to draw attention to and create relations during artistic processes. These could be, for

instance, directives, proposals, words, movements, experiences, experiments, methods, ideas, decision-making, affects, concepts, infrastructures, problems, institutional structures, and so on. Allowing these apparatuses to emerge and be articulated between many also points to a practice of dramaturgy that engages with the search for commons on several grounds stemming from the artistic, which incorporates the aesthetic, the infrastructural, and the social.

Tasks that expose individual dramaturgical processes to others and in this way open such processes up to potential interventions, interruptions, and possibly transformations by others, are thus hereby understood as operating upon the principle of commoning. Reversing this line of thinking, it could be argued that, in order for dramaturgy to be activated, one needs to experiment with modes of working together, so that dramaturgy in the end is a matter of encounter, exchange, and collaboration. A lot has been written in the last few years about collaboration in the performing arts. Many of these writings draw critical attention upon the commodification and overabundance of collaboration in artistic practices and caution against the legacy of the author over the work.[62] Nienke Scholts justly reminds us in her text that appears in this book that dramaturgy is mainly concerned with how people work together, and she describes how developing the dramaturgy of her collaboration with another dramaturg means that they, for example, have been imagining different forms of partnership. As Scholts' reflections on her dramaturgical partnering with Igor Dobričić demonstrate, thinking and searching through collaboration can arrive at affects, ways of working, and modes of socialization that resist the logic of capitalist production because they opt for the durational, the unspectacular, the unproductive, and the elusive.

Our suggestion is close to that of Scholts, although we are deliberately thinking through processes of commoning that could be regarded as a radical extension of collaboration, because the latter is most commonly understood in the frame of current artistic production as bereft of political implications.[63] The principle of commoning on the one hand directly engages with the emergence and constitution of the commons, and on the other enables a critical approach towards human individualism because of conceiving of the individual on the basis of relations and intra-dependency with all others. A highly relational perspective can therefore

become socially and politically radical. The increasing individuality and capitalization of human language and subjectivity, where humans are expected to constantly produce and communicate their 'selves' and their innovative ideas, has been noteworthy in the last decades. At the same time, political and social processes that determine which lives (human and nonhuman) are protected and which are not are at play. Lorey also positions her thesis on the commons to a large extent against the phenomenon of individualism today and explains that individualization,

> means isolation, and this kind of separation is primarily a matter of constituting oneself by way of imaginary relationships, constituting one's 'own' inner being, and only secondly and to a lesser extent by way of connections with others. Yet this interiority and self-reference is not an expression of independence, but rather the crucial element in the pastoral relationship to obedience.[64]

It thus becomes apparent that our approach of dramaturgy, not solely dependent on the persona of a dramaturg, is rather conceived as an attentive engagement that is distributed among everyone who is taking part in a process, including the eventual audience. This reminds us once again of the writing of Bleeker, who understands the dramaturg as the one who thinks *no-one's thought*, and argues that dramaturgical engagement with a performance can be understood as a 'complex and continuously changing set of relationships',[65] a suggestion that resonates with the ways in which Heathfield and Lepecki have also approached dramaturgy as a process that belongs to the work and not to a single person and that is shared among many. Dramaturgy as a type of working that belongs to many that are taking part in an artistic process is therefore crucial when proposing commoning as a principle of dramaturgy. And in this sense, the commons can only be envisioned as emerging *between* individuals that are intra-related and intra-dependent.

Dramaturgy operating under the principle of commoning thus puts plurality and relationality 'at work'. Against this backdrop, the practice of dramaturgy translates into a searching for and articulating of what may count as common in the differential apparatuses that are involved in the making of an artwork, which may equally include artistic methodologies, infrastructures, and working conditions.

Notes

1 Participants of 6M1L/ex.e.r.ce08, 'Questioning', in Ingvartsen, *6 Months 1 Location*, p. 112.

2 The project *6 MONTHS 1 LOCATION (6M1L)* was initiated by choreographer Xavier Le Roy and took place at the Centre Choréographique Nationale de Montpellier in Languédoc-Roussillion from July to December 2008, with the participation of seventeen artists, all working in one location over six months, each leading a project and collaborating in at least one more project. The overall aim was to explore what it means to work under 'special conditions' of research and education, considered as different from the usual conditions of freelance independent production.

3 For example, in the workshop in Tilburg, the Netherlands (December 2014), which focused on feedback as a dramaturgical activity, we formed two groups, each of which worked with one of the two following questions, respectively: 'What do I need when giving feedback?' and 'What do I need when receiving feedback?' The starting question in Thessaloniki, Greece (May 2015) was 'What do I need in order to co-create?' and, in London (September 2015), where the focus was on dramaturgy as 'working on actions', we started from the question: 'How do actions involve others?'

4 See, for example: Cole, 'In the Perfect World of Doubt'; Protopapa, 'Choreographic Practice and the State of Questioning'.

5 See, for example: Laermans, '"Being in Common"'; Sennett, *Together*.

6 See, for example: Georgelou, 'Inside the Wor(l)d Collaboration'; Kunst, 'Prognosis on Collaboration'.

7 Burrows and Ritsema, 'Weak Dance Strong Questions', p. 28.

8 Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems*, pp. 144, 149, 150.

9 Examples of questions Deborah Hay may work with are: 'What if every cell in the body had the potential to get what it needs, while surrendering the habit of a singular facing, and inviting being seen?', see: Hill, "What If?", http://interventionsjournal.net/2015/01/22/what-if-digital-documentation-as-performance-and-the-body-as-archive-in-deborah-hays-no-time-to-fly/#_ftn7. Or the question, 'What if where I am is what I need?', see: Bissell, 'Communities of Consciousness and the Begetting of Deborah Hay', www.pcah.us/media/files/b304ea5e902bb4564f-771de3b8b49966.pdf.

10 In fact, we return to the risk of potentially glorifying any term and practice suggesting uncertainty and unknowing in considering dramaturgy when describing the second principle of 'alienating'. See also Simon Bayly's text in Part II of this book, who similarly problematizes the relation of knowing and not-knowing in his discussion of 'anxious dramaturgy' and the role of the dramaturg.

11 Cvejić 'The Ignorant Dramaturg', p. 43.

12 Ibid., p. 41.

13 Ibid., p. 45.

14 Ibid., p. 49.

15 Ibid., p. 53.

16 One could argue that 'Weak Dance Strong Questions' does precisely this: Burrows and Ritsema seek to remain open to all possibilities, as they ask 'Is it that we try to dance in a way in which every movement contains the possibility of all directions?' (Burrows and Ritsema, 'Weak Dance Strong Questions', p. 31).

17 Bleeker, 'Thinking No-One's Thought', p. 70.

18 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

19 Bohm, *On Dialogue*, p. 7.

20 Ibid., p. 60.

21 Lee, 'Foreword', p. xiii–xiv.

22 From Nicola Conibere's unpublished statement, Roundtable Discussion, Sadler's Wells, London, 18 September 2015.

23 Cixous, in conversation with Heathfield, *Writing Not Yet Thought*.

24 Notes from the workshop plans for Brussels, Belgium (November 2014) and Thessaloniki, Greece (May 2015). The task is inspired by Lisa Nelson's Tuning Scores (for more information: http://olga0.oralsite.be/oralsite/pages/Testpage_Lisa_Nelson_%28general%29/index.html).

25 Luoto, 'Work, Practice, Event', p. 36.

26 Ric Allsopp also refers to 'an affective "something else" that emerges in performance' (p. 125) in order to discuss choreographic images that appear between what disappears or is forgotten — images that emerge, as he notes by quoting Jasper John, 'when a thing becomes other than it is' (p. 127). See: Allsopp, 'Something Else', pp. 125–53.

27 Luoto, 'Work, Practice, Event', p. 36.

28 Lepecki, '"We Are Not Ready for the Dramaturge"', p. 187, emphasis given in the original.

29 Ibid., p. 190, emphasis given in the original.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 191.

32 Heathfield, 'Dramaturgy without a Dramaturge', p. 110.

33 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 91.

34 Lepecki, '"We Are Not Ready for the Dramaturge"', p. 193.

35 Ibid., p. 194.

36 See also Joachim Robbrecht's text in Part II of the book, who similarly discusses dramaturgy as a tool to fight one's way out of worn-out questions and arguments, by breaking the 'linguacode' one usually works in and bringing elements together in different constellations.

37 Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy*, p. 11, emphasis given in the original.

38 Ibid., p. 11.

39 Ibid., pp. 11–12. Barba refers, for example, to decisions such as that of radically limiting the space one works in, or miniaturizing around a table a scene acted out in a wider area, in order to open up other perspectives that extend possible choices.

40 Ibid., p. 12.

41 Ibid.

42 Virno cited in Lavaert and Gielen, 'The Dismeasure of Art', p. 30.

43 Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 3.

44 Ibid., p. 65.

45 Ibid., p. 11, emphasis given in the original.

46 Ibid., emphasis given in the original.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., p. 70, emphasis given in the original.

49 Ibid., p. 77.

50 See Betina Panagiotara's text in Part II of the book.

51 In the context of the workshops we often introduced interruptions and interferences by others that we considered 'gifts', in order to signal their generous 'positive' way of working towards one another's processes.

52 Notes from workshop plans: Brussels, Belgium, November 2014; Amsterdam, the Netherlands, July 2015; London, UK, September 2015.

53 For example, we worked in several instances with Lisa Nelson's Tuning Scores, which we modified for the purposes of this exchange and is also described in the context of the principle of 'alienating'.

54 There are, for instance, several examples of such processes of exchange denoted in the project between contemporary dance artists, which appears in the form of a website called 'everybodystoolbox'; see, for example: http://everybodystoolbox.net/index.php?title=Accueil (accessed 12 April 2016).

55 Lorey, 'Becoming Common' (emphasis in the original) www.e-flux.com/journal/becoming-common-precar-ization-as-political-constituting.

56 Ibid.

57 Here we refer to concentration camps as well as to several biometric technologies, such as optic scanners, chipped identity cards, and fingerprints. These show how the state gains an increasing control over the people, using biological identity for political purposes.

58 The dimensions of precarity have been discussed in detail by Lorey also in an earlier article: 'Governmental Precarization', http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/lorey/en

59 Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, p. 104.

60 Ibid., p. 104.

61 In *State of Insecurity*, Lorey has made reference to the common as 'a social ontological constitution', which was proposed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and has contested this approach by arguing that an ontologically grounded common that is based upon the premises of equality is not enough as political agency. Lorey has rather suggested that the 'common' is what must first emerge and be constituted.

62 Ignoring or undermining the political dimension of collaboration has been critically investigated in the last years. See: Cvejić, 'Learning by Making'; Georgelou, 'Inside the Wor(l)d Collaboration'; Kunst, 'Prognosis

on Collaboration'; Van Imschoot,
'Anxious Dramaturgy'.

63   Kunst (ibid.) and Van Imschoot
(ibid.) are noteworthy exceptions in
that regard.

64   Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, p. 13.

65   Bleeker, 'Thinking No-One's
Thought', p. 71.