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**Creative Producing:**  
**The Dramaturgy of Creating New Work in the Commercial and Nonprofit Theatres**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Catherine L. Cammarata**

to

The Graduate School  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Dramaturgy**

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Abstract of the Thesis

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The American Theatre is undergoing a renaissance of new work. More new plays are being written than can be produced, both in New York and around the country; multiple new ways of expression are being found utilizing new technologies and interactive performance techniques. But unless realized in a production, these plays are destined to become overlooked. How does a new play make an impact upon the culture today in these difficult economic times? There is a need for Creative Producers skilled in dramaturgy, to nurture and develop these projects from the very beginning and bring them to life. Creative Producers can bring to fruition the voices and images that accurately reflect our American experience at the beginning of the twenty-first century and secure their future in the American theatrical canon for posterity.

I think only people in the theatre know what a producer is.

The public does not know.

It knows a writer writes, and an actor acts,

And a director tells them what to do.

A producer raises money.

Well, he does, and in some cases that's all he does.

But the workers in the theatre know that this is not the real thing.

A producer is a rare, paradoxical genius –

Hard-headed, soft-hearted, cautious, reckless,

A hopeful innocent in fair weather,

A stern pilot in stormy weather,

A mathematician who prefers to ignore the laws of mathematics

And trust intuition,

An idealist, a realist, a practical dreamer,

A sophisticated gambler, a stage-struck child.

That's a producer.

- Oscar Hammerstein II

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## Introduction

### THE CREATIVE PRODUCER

On Monday, May 13, 2013, in a speech at the Theater Communications Group (TCG) Gala, Emily Mann, longtime Artistic Director of the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, NJ, stated that the nonprofit movement was started because the commercial theater was “destroying theater as an art form.” This was an odd statement for Ms. Mann to make, having just received an honorary Tony award for the McCarter Theatre for its contribution to the vital function in the health of American theater, and having *Vanya & Sonia & Masha & Spike* – developed at the McCarter – nominated for best play. Many in the commercial theater were offended by her comments, feeling that regional nonprofit theaters should be grateful to Broadway for allowing them to actually make a profit on occasion.

This in essence is the current debate in the American theater. In an era of diminished support from government and private foundations, the regional nonprofit theater sometimes is driven by an economic imperative to form partnerships with commercial producers to create new work – often works of significant value that, once having appeared on Broadway, provide enough necessary monetary success to allow the nonprofit theater a financial cushion it wouldn't otherwise have. Yet, while grateful for the funding, nonprofits are ever cautious about accepting money from “the dark side,” for fear of loss of control of the artistic product, and for fear of betraying the mission under which the organization must adhere. Commercial producers are driving these partnerships, lured by the opportunity to develop new work away from New York at a reasonable cost. However, as Ms. Mann's comments show, everyone isn't always perfectly happy with the current arrangements.

During the 1930's and 1940's, there was a feeling that there were important stories to be told that wouldn't and couldn't be produced by the commercial theater; the resulting Regional Theatre Movement during the 1930's and 1940's, led by its three founding matriarchs of Margo Jones, Nina Vance and Zelda Fichandler, proposed a new nonprofit model supported by local communities, which would have the artistic

mission to create new work and produce new interpretations of the classics to bring about a new renaissance to the American theatre in the twentieth century. Many participants of the Regional Theatre Movement felt that it was their mission to create “art” – as opposed to the mission of the commercial theatre, which they often perceived to be merely to generate income – that somehow made their work more “noble” than the work that was developed in the commercial sector. In the eyes of the nonprofit theatre, Broadway sometimes is still an entity not wholly to be trusted, the “other”, a center of crass consumerism. Founding leader Zelda Fichandler was burned once in an attempt to bring an Arena Stage production of *The Great White Hope* to Broadway; forever after her response to such partnerships was “Broadway: no.” Her emphatic reply is still famously on the lips of many nonprofit artistic directors to this day.

Commercial producers take offense at being perceived as merely “money men” (and women) - they consider themselves to be just as creative and hands-on as the nonprofits, investing in the life of the play for the long haul. A producer looks beyond a single production to guide the entire life of the play from conception to (hopefully) an enduring life in the regional, educational and community theaters. A producer’s enthusiasm and belief in a production is the fuel that drives the play forward, and the perception, on the part of nonprofits, that just because this development happens within a commercial context that it does not qualify as “art” sets up an undercurrent of mistrust that persists, barring previous working relationships that may have already been formed.

Most new plays are driven by a commercial producer who receives permission from the playwright, or the playwright’s agent, to produce the play. He spends years on the research and development end for the play, hosting readings and developmental workshops to help a play find its own signature voice, and gathering a committed team of professionals in preparation for rehearsals to begin. He does this all without being paid, without drawing a salary on the project, and spends money on development that he has persuaded investors to give him, all because he believes in the work. He believes in the theater just as much as the “art-driven” nonprofits do.

There is a need today for producers and artistic directors skilled in dramaturgy to nurture and develop these new projects, to encourage emerging playwrights to develop new work in order to expand the scope of American theater. Commercial producers with a dramaturgical sensibility can creatively bridge the gap between the nonprofit and commercial theater and encourage partnerships between the two that are beneficial to both. Producers skilled in dramaturgy can bring to fruition the voices and images that accurately reflect our American experience at the beginning of the twenty-first century and secure their future in the American theatrical canon for posterity.

Jill Rafson, the Literary Manager of the Roundabout Theatre in New York City, called for recent graduates from The Commercial Theater Institute - an organization that trains new producers - to become "*Creative Producers*." She said that "Creative Producing" was the most underdeveloped skill in the industry, and that only through the insight and leadership of Creative Producers would emerging playwrights be challenged to develop more innovative and original work. Another successful guest lecturer in the program, commercial producer Kevin McCollum, pointed to a dramaturg in the class and told the rest, "You all should know what she knows."

Producers breathe life into a script. Playwrights need producers to mount their plays and to project their voice into the larger culture for them. Creative Producers, using the skills and knowledge of dramaturgy, are necessary today to help develop original new plays and to contribute significant new work into the American theatre canon. In this thesis I will show how modern commercial producers are taking up the call to create good theatre and to work together in partnerships with nonprofits to make this happen.

## Chapter 1

### DRAMATURGY IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE

*Dramaturgy is the concern with composition, structure, staging and audience from literary analysis and historiography.*

- G E Lessing, The Hamburg Dramaturgy, 1767-69

Dramaturgy is an integral part of the work that anyone does on a play, whether or not that work is performed by someone called a dramaturg. Encompassing directing, playwriting, acting, theatre history, dramatic theory and criticism, dramaturgy is a necessary part of the process for the creation of good theater. New producers wish they had the skills that every dramaturg possesses by virtue of their knowledge, aesthetic and dramaturgical sensibilities. Producers who have the skills that come out of dramaturgy programs, who have a knowledge of plays, playwrights, theatre history and methodologies, and who have the ability to make creative decisions like which plays to produce and what creative teams to put together make the most dynamic work possible. These are the producers who will be poised to make the greatest contributions to the American theater in the future.

In an attempt to raise the intellectual and artistic level of the German theater, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729 – 1781), a playwright and philosopher, was hired by the Hamburg National Theater in 1767 to champion the development of a national repertoire in Germany. His task was to contribute to the development of a new bourgeois German drama, along with some classics and Shakespeare, and to provide “in-house criticism” of the company’s work. His process in achieving these goals has now become known as

dramaturgy, and the dramaturg has a well-established voice in the development and production of plays in the European (especially German) theater.

The emergence of the dramaturg in the United States as a specialized member of the creative team has been slowed considerably by the fact that those dramaturgical functions were initially performed by producers, directors, “play doctors” and, occasionally, guest scholars who would be brought in to provide advice on the script and background for a period play. The explosion of the Regional Theater Movement, meanwhile, created a need for new work, but had no system in place to encourage young playwrights. Out of necessity leaders of the regionals looked back to traditional Western and Eastern European models of theatrical practice and imported the idea of the dramaturg into the American theatre.

However, dramaturgy as a philosophy of theatre making is much larger than the specific role of a person known as a “dramaturg”; dramaturgy is everyone’s business. If dramaturgy is built on research and analysis, each member of the team must do his own dramaturgy in order to thoroughly discover the world of the play and to creatively explore how the play will be done.

In that expanded definition, the Creative Producer does his research and creates a plan for the production, determining what the potential audience is and what the message could be. This information is extremely valuable to him, because it gives him a roadmap of how to proceed. Armed with this vision, or concept, of the production, the producer then organizes his creative team and inspires others to join him in making his vision come to life. The producer’s dramaturgy is how he brings together the director, each investor, the designers, the actors – everyone involved in the production. His dramaturgy inspires the central organizing ideas that, later, the marketing team, publicists, and even box office workers and ushers need to know in order to respond to patron’s questions about the show. The producer’s dramaturgy, and his belief in the project, is the catalyst that ultimately results in a staged production.

At its essence, dramaturgy is a creative function of theatre-making that permeates every level of the process in developing a production. It’s not commonly or intuitively

thought that producers should be skilled in the process of dramaturgy. Producers must take care of the economic interests of the play as well as the investors they answer to; however, a producer's true investment in a production goes beyond their monetary commitments.

There is a difference between "Creative Producers" and "Above the Title" producers. Creative Producers are skilled theatre-makers who work dramaturgically and can guide an artistic work into a meaningful form and expression; they invest not merely in one show, but concentrate on developing the plays, and playwrights, for the long term. They work much like a dramaturg does, in order to discover the uniqueness of each play. An Above-the-Title producer, by contrast, is one who is looking for a "hit show" all the time and who concentrates on getting enough funding to literally buy his place over the title of the production. There are many of both types of producer today. However, only the Creative Producer is fully invested to guide a new work and nurture it to life, having the patience to create meaningful theatre.

Dramaturgy may be defined, in its multiple iterations, as a theatre-maker's philosophy of theatre. However, most theatre practitioners today will tell you that they are still somewhat mystified by the specific nature of a dramaturg's function. Playwrights are sometimes annoyed by having a dramaturg assigned to "help" them develop their play; directors sometimes reduce the dramaturg's contribution to research, preferring to do the real "dramaturgy" themselves. What exactly is the dramaturg's role in current theatrical practice? And how does a producer practice dramaturgy?

One of the best working definitions of dramaturgy comes from Michael Mark Chemers. In his book *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*. Chemers refers to dramaturgy as both the aesthetic architecture of a work of dramatic literature (structure, themes, goals, and conventions) and the practical philosophy of theatre practice employed to create a full performance. Together, dramaturgy is "the very blood coursing through the veins of any theatrical production" (Chemers 3).

Specifically, Chemers lists three things that ALL good theatrical artists do that constitute good "dramaturgical" practice:

1. Determine what the aesthetic architecture of a piece of dramatic literature actually is (analysis)
2. Discover everything needed to transform that inert script into a living piece of theatre (research)
3. Apply that knowledge in a way that makes sense to a living audience at this time in this place (practical application) (3)

Cheemer's rules are hard to argue with. In essence, it is the responsibility of the entire production team, directors, designers, actors, dramaturgs, and producers, to do their own "dramaturgy" each and every time they commit themselves to co-create a theatrical work.

A dramaturg asks questions. He is the extra set of eyes and ears that work along with directors and playwrights in a production. As a member of the creative team, dramaturgs specialize in transforming a dramatic script into a meaningful performance and help shape the theatrical product from conception to performance.

Although dramaturgy has been an established practice in Europe since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was relatively unknown in the United States until the second half of the twentieth century. At an address presented at the Convention of the American Educational Theatre Association in Chicago on December 30, 1949 – on the very brink of an explosion of so many modern theatrical movements that were to form an artistic alternative to Broadway – Professor George R. Kernodle from the State University of Iowa issued a clarion call for "active producers of plays" (directors, designers, actors and playwrights) who have a "deeper grounding in history" to break away from the choice of plays consisting of then-current Broadway successes in favor of creating original work:

If we expect to make any choices, if we expect to control creatively our directions in the future, we must understand where we are and how we got to this point. We must understand the culture we are a part of, what its main strengths and weaknesses are, and how it has been reshaped by each generation of the past...History cannot tell what the future will be, but it can tell us, who must make the future,

who and what we are. It can tell us, who must produce the plays of the future, which qualities and styles will serve our needs. (Kernodle 102-03)

Professor Kernodle doesn't use the word *dramaturgy*, but it is dramaturgical practice that helps make these informed choices, and the "active producer" he speaks of is most often today the modern artistic director or producer who initiates these original projects. The artistic director or producer, using good dramaturgy, can gather together all the resources available to create the "plays of the future."

Good producers, like good dramaturgs, need a specialized set of skills:

- History, spanning many cultures, movements and periods, and the ability to do historical research
- Wide knowledge of theatre and theatrical practice on many different levels
- Understanding the tools of the playwright – structure, voice, perspective, analysis
- Facility with the roles that theatre can play in society
- Intuition regarding different audiences: their needs, desires and expectations
- An inquisitive, questioning spirit that is not easily satisfied
- An enthusiastic, collaborative nature that inspires trust and leadership

Jack Viertel, a notable Broadway producer and Creative Director at Jujamcyn Theatres, originally was a dramaturg at the Mark Taper Forum. He points out that what he does today as a producer is very similar to what he did previously as a dramaturg. "I still ask questions," said Viertel. "I spend more time discussing things than you would think. I read a lot of plays, do relationship building with playwrights, and I'm the producer who has the relationship with the people. I spend more time discussing the production with the director and designers than I do interfacing with financial or management people" (Dorbian 50-51).

There may be a direct role for dramaturgs in the American commercial theatre, but that seems unlikely to happen anytime soon. Until then, as the champion of new work, the



skills of dramaturgy can inform and guide a producer's concept of the play and what it is about as he works together with the playwright to bring it to life.

## Chapter 2

### THE ROLE OF THE PRODUCER IN THE COMMERCIAL THEATRE

*When we go to the theater we want the hair on the back of our neck to stand and our eyes to well with tears because of the sheer brilliance of that surprise.*

*-Kevin McCollum, Broadway producer (Rent, Avenue Q)*

Before a script becomes a production, there must be someone who champions it, believes in it, and who nurtures it into its existence. One of the first is the producer.

One of the most foundational relationships is the one between the producer and the playwright. Producers are always on the lookout for a new playwright to believe in, a unique voice to promote; and a playwright needs to have a champion, someone who will help his words find a stage. There is a mutual alignment of interest between the two for the express purpose of creating theatre.

Playwrights, directors and agents will often invite producers to industry readings or workshop productions they're involved in, hoping that they will believe in their project and option it. Bringing a play to Broadway typically costs between two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half million dollars – six-and-a-half to fifteen million dollars for musicals, although *Shrek* and *Billy Elliott* were both over twenty-five million – and Off-Broadway costs for a non-musical are close to a million dollars as well, with an Off-Broadway musical averaging at least two million dollars. With the current costs, more likely than not, there will be a

whole team of producers involved, each with their names above the title - although only one or two are the lead producers involved with the actual day to day business of guiding the production team through to opening night.

Given the current costs of producing on Broadway, eight out of ten shows won't recoup their initial investments - yet, that still means that two or three will. Even if a production doesn't recoup immediately on Broadway, there is still money to be made when one considers touring productions, royalty pools, merchandise licensing opportunities, etc. Inside many producers live a wide-eyed optimist, an enthusiastic theatre-lover, who has decided that for better or worse there is no business like show business. Deep inside is the belief that somehow the plays they produce can have an impact on people - maybe even change the world a little bit for the better. Good storytelling can change the world, and open people's minds to consider viewpoints that they previously would not. This passion is largely what motivates a creative producer.

Producers are the people who take the words off the page give them the opportunity to come alive on a stage. For some producers it is difficult enough to just raise the money to get the project on its feet; these Above-The-Title producers see their job primarily as letting the "creatives" do their job while they do theirs. Other producers who think more dramaturgically, like Kevin McCollum, feel a more expansive responsibility.

I have never believed that a producer's job is to raise money. That is like saying an actor's job is simply to read lines. The marginalization of a producer's role in theatre today as just a money person is very destructive to the ecosystem that is musical theatre. I feel a producer's job is to help create an environment and provide the tools and philosophy that enable a new work to grow into its fullest potential. (Vogel 79)

There is a new breed of commercial producer around, like Mr. McCollum who believe that successful producers contribute more to the culture than just an enjoyable evening at the theater. McCollum maintains that at its core all theater is research and development; before a producer embarks on a career of producing he should have a philosophy as to *why* he is producing something; that is his first goal. “Producing just so you can be a producer does not count as a philosophy...unless you are wildly wealthy and have a jaded view of yourself...and a low self-esteem,” he says. “You’re talking about the money, but the sinewy material that keeps us all coming to this frustrating and glorious industry is we’re passion junkies” (Ragsdale 51). Commercial producers stake their lives and livelihoods on one and then another show they believe in enough to gamble on against terrible odds. Yet, they are able to mediate those odds with dramaturgical research and development, the hallmark of a Creative Producer.

Other producers agree with McCollum. Daryl Roth (*Proof, How I Learned to Drive, Caroline or Change, The Tale of the Allergist’s Wife*) says that she always keeps her mind on the big picture – that what she does has reverberations in the world:

I think as a producer, one has to think about what their responsibility is, and the material you put out there. For me, I’ve always tried to put out things that could make a difference for people – that could make them think about the world a little differently. Or, change somebody’s opinion about somebody or some group of people. Be politically aware... (Vogel 108)

What gets produced each year is a reflection of who we are at a particular point in time – collectively as a country, as a culture, and as a people. What we think of ourselves and others is expressed in our collective artistic output on the screen, in the media, in our visual arts and in our theaters. Intuitively and generally we know the roles of theatre artists: an actor who has a responsibility to accurately portray the inner life of a character to reflect the intention of the playwright; or a director who organizes the playwright’s

intention into a working, vital concept to get his voice out into society; but a little more obscured is the producer's responsibility to build and inspire a creative team that will support all of these expressions and act as the catalyst to project it physically into the world on the stage. What is conceived of originally by a playwright, or devisors, receives its full expression into the culture by the producer's dramaturgy that pulls it all together and makes it happen.

There's an important point that needs to be brought out here. For better or worse, Broadway, as the apex of the American theatre, defines success. Success on Broadway is determined how long a show runs, Tony awards, box office success, star power, and all the other bells and whistles that impact the life of a play (and the careers of the producing and creative teams that make it happen). No matter how long a play runs on the regional theatre circuit, it cannot compare to a Broadway run of any length. A Broadway run almost guarantees that a new work will find an extended life and have an effect on American theatre culture.

As so eloquently expressed by Christopher Ashley, the Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse, who moved *Memphis* to Broadway in 2009:

You have to be really successful in a tour around the nonprofits, hitting an Off-Broadway theater, winning the Pulitzer prize – you have to really hit the jackpot in other ways if you're going to avoid New York and really have the play land, like go on to be produced for years and years. So I think it's a conundrum in producing new work, of how do you give that play an ongoing life in this country without going to New York? (Ragsdale 71)

And as Broadway producer Margo Lion (*Angels in America*, *Hairspray*) stresses, for the playwrights, going to New York is crucial:

No, it's visibility .... It's not just a living, it's *visibility*. They want to be written up. They want to have a chance at awards. They want to be in the discussion; but they're afraid they're not going to be in the discussion if they aren't produced on Broadway. (Ragsdale 150)

For a playwright, having a play go to Broadway is just about the only way for it to enter the American theatre canon and have a continued life in anthologies and archives. For better or worse, Broadway effectively “brands” a theatrical work, giving it substance and importance, and qualifying it for other prestigious awards and high-level publicity. Producing a play on Broadway is the supreme contribution that a producer can make that can impact the larger culture for posterity.

### Chapter 3

#### **STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS: VISIONARY PRODUCERS FROM THE PAST**

*First, we must take our gaze and any preoccupation away, away from Broadway, from which we took our leave many years ago. If they want what we discover, nourish and perform, that's okay, though if we have acting companies, we will lose them.*

*Always: he who pays the piper calls the tune.*

*– Zelda Fichandler*

At the turn of the twentieth century the Little Theatre Movement gave voice to theatre-makers who went against the mainstream of commercial theatre as popular entertainment. Inspired by European touring companies, they envisioned a theatrical

environment where “art” and risk-taking could be supported financially by entities who believed that artistic expression mattered. These were the early theatrical pioneers and the Regional Theatre Movement.

Despite the dominance of commercialism in the American theatre, there were some quality-minded commercial producers in New York, like Cheryl Crawford, who was a member of the Group Theater, or Jean Dalyrmple, founder of New York’s City Center for the Performing Arts and the American Theatre Wing, who had first produced Paul Robeson in *Othello* on Broadway. They were in the minority. The majority of commercial producers at that time in history seemed to be more interested in creating a profitable bottom line than in creating art with lasting significance. Many people felt a revolt was necessary.

Starting with the Little Theatre Movement in Chicago in 1912, theatre artists across the United States began to form companies to produce more intimate, non-commercial productions, inspired by the new European plays which soon found their way into their repertoire. Many new companies were influenced by the European playwrights’ highly detailed naturalism as well as their provocative expressionism, and began to experiment with changing dramatic forms, story-telling, acting styles, set design, dialogue and mise-en-scene. On the East Coast, groups like the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players emerged, sparking the careers of Eugene O’Neill and Susan Glaspell. Another, the Theatre Guild, which was primarily a producing organization, found and fostered such playwrights as Robert E. Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson and Elmer Rice. Azubah Latham had her theatre-in-the-round experiments at Columbia University in 1914, and Hallie Flanagan directed the Federal Theatre Project in the 1930’s.

Times were changing, but not necessarily public tastes. Joseph Wesley Zeigler in his book *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* writes:

They [the new theater companies] were a new anti-Establishment revolution...At the same time that they were rebelling against the

Broadway Establishment, they were seeking to establish their theatres and themselves in their own communities. (Zeigler 171)

The intention was not to fix the existing structures of Broadway and the commercial theatre; it was to establish something new and better. This was the artistic revolution.

In her important book *Theatre-in-the-Round*, Margo Jones envisioned in 1951 a decentralized professional theatre movement dedicated to the creation of new work as well as the restaging of the classics. By 1943, she decided to form a permanent resident professional theater with a repertory system, dedicated to producing new plays and classics, in Texas. Her work inspired Nina Vance, founder of Houston's Alley Theatre in 1947, and Zelda Fichandler, co-founder of Arena Stage in 1950. Fichandler cites Jones as "the person who influenced her the most," and reminisces that:

Some of us looked about and saw that something was amiss. What was essentially a collective and cumulative art form was represented in the United States by the hit-or-miss, make-a-pudding, smash-a-pudding system of Broadway production. What required by its nature continuity and groupness, not to mention a certain quietude of spirit and the fifth freedom, the freedom to fail, was taking place in an atmosphere of hysteria, crisis, fragmentation, one-shotness and mammon-mindedness within ten blocks of Broadway." (Chinoy 207)

Margo Jones in her book *Theatre in the Round* had written: "The production of classics is healthy, but...the seeds of progress in the theatre lies in new plays." These three matriarchs of the Regional Theatre Movement – Margo Jones, Nina Vance, and Zelda Fichandler – were the inspiration and the impetus that led to a blossoming of professional theater and new work across the country. They forged the models of the Creative Producer espoused in this thesis. Playwrights such as William Inge, Paul Zindel, Tennessee Williams, and Lillian Hellman all were given their first opportunities at the

hands of these early resident theaters that wished to nurture and support young playwrights. The voice of the writer was of primary importance, as was the creation of new works.

Then, in 1963, the legendary Tyrone Guthrie opened the Minneapolis Theatre in Minnesota. Already an established commercial director and previous administrator of the Old Vic Theatre in London, Guthrie had built a name for himself by his novel interpretations of standard works and his quality productions. Tyrone Guthrie was no Margo Jones, Nina Vance, or Zelda Fichandler. Already in his sixties, Guthrie was a seasoned theatre veteran with an established commercial reputation behind him. He was also a British citizen, with a certain amount of arrogance in his attitude toward American theatre. As Joe Dowling, director of The Guthrie Theater, explained in his key note address to the Theatre Communications Group National Conference in 2007:

.... the creation of the Guthrie was significantly different from other pioneer theaters... Guthrie and his colleagues, when they decided to decentralize American theatre and to create a new movement with a different theatrical energy, they were already major figures in New York, and, indeed in Guthrie's case, throughout the world. ...the new institution was seen immediately as the hope of the whole movement. ("Artistry in a New Century" TCG 2007)

Sir Tyrone Guthrie did have the prestige, connections and knowledge to create impressive theatre even out in the Midwest, but unfortunately, Sir Tyrone's vision did not include the development of new American plays. As he writes in his 1964 book *A New Theatre*:

It seemed to us that the only way of knowing a good play from a bad one was to apply the test of *time*. *Our programme would be classical* ... If it be granted that fifty years is the absolute minimum of time



required before a new work of art can wisely be regarded as a classic... [But] we certainly did not want it to appear as if once again Britain were trying to instruct the colonists. It therefore seemed to us essential to include each season *one* American play of what we considered to be potential classical status. (Guthrie 41-42)

Sir Tyrone's perceived arrogance may be founded in the fact that he would only include one American play each season in his new American theater. Guthrie's "test of time" of fifty years dealt a severe blow to the production of new plays of relevance until 1986.

However, we must remember that Guthrie was a British citizen and a prominent theatrical director. His goal was to establish quality theatre in a resident company, not to develop a new American theatre. Although some still argue that Guthrie "hijacked" the Regional Theatre Movement away from the creation of new works, his productions did legitimize the regional movement and gave hope to other theaters that they, too, could be recognized on a national level.

Back in New York City, attempts by commercial producers to form resident companies within New York City itself often met with disappointment, such as Group Theatre producer Cheryl Crawford's failed attempt in 1947 to found the American Repertory Theatre. She famously wrote that she had "no faith that such a theatre can exist under present conditions, and I can see no way in which these conditions can be substantially changed" (Crawford 156). Crawford and her contemporaries paved the way for those changes that would come in the next decade.

Visionaries are often needed when the way seems darkest. As ticket prices rose each year, more and more New Yorkers were not able to afford the price of admission to the important theatrical works being produced right in their own back yards. Joseph Papp, (née Papirovsy), a child of impoverished immigrant parents, grew up in a tenement apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and believed that the theatre and its stories should be available to all people, just as books are accessible to everyone in the library. He also

believed that playwrights were an important national resource, and was personally committed to developing many of those he believed in.

Although one of his primary goals was to bring fresh productions of Shakespeare to the common people, Papp was a really a prototype Creative Producer. Robert Brustein called him “the most successful producer on Broadway” and “a primary New York facilitator for the avant-garde” (Brustein 36). No wonder the press began to identify him as the very personification of the American theater in our time.

Joe Papp first fell in love with Shakespeare in English class when he was twelve years old:

I think what drew me to Shakespeare then is what I’m still attracted to now: it sounded good and it gave you something you could really chew on and learn. You can memorize Shakespeare much more easily than other plays because the speeches are constructed like music. There’s a structure, a beat, a rhythm, a whole design, and after a while your ear becomes attuned to that and you can pick it up. (Turan 18)

He was able to realize his dream of free Shakespeare in New York in the 1956 production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and, building on his success the following year, Papp was able to move his company into the Delacorte Theater in Central Park and to tour his productions for free to all five boroughs. But he still wanted to be producing new work:

I wanted to be doing contemporary plays, that was the major thing I was concerned with...In order to make Shakespeare alive you have to be in the contemporary theater – each aspect enriches the other. So I needed a permanent home that would be a theater for new plays.” (173)

Papp got his wish in 1971, when he was able to buy the old Astor Library on Lafayette Street. He renamed it the Public Theatre, hoping to attract newer, less conventional audiences to downtown theatre and to foster new and innovative playwrights. But he had no idea what to produce until one night, while riding the train back to New York from New Haven, Connecticut. Papp was teaching at Yale. A young actor whom Papp called “a gen-u-ine hippie” (183) struck up a conversation with him and showed him some six or seven hand-written yellow sheets of paper. It was a musical he was writing, and he showed Papp a few scenes and some lyrics for one of the new songs called “Hair”. Although Joe wasn’t sure he liked all of it, the writing seemed smart and current. Says Papp of that moment:

I always want to do something that comes out of the times we’re living in, and all around us at the theater, in what was being called the East Village, were all the hippies. It was no bullshit, you’d go out the door and there they all were. (183-84)

Joe liked it, and he especially liked their new composer Galt MacDermot’s song “Aquarius.” “This is about the alienation of youth,” he gushed. “I’m going to do a rock musical” (186). Papp knew that developing new work had to be his main thrust for his new Public Theater. It was fresh, youthful, innovative, and reflective of the times they were living in:

Everybody was against it, it was unheard of at the time, but I felt I was taking a tremendously positive chance. I was intrigued by it, it seemed extremely provocative, and it was about something that was going on. “Why the hell should I be doing an English play to begin with?” I said. “We should be doing American plays, that’s the way to start a theatre.” (186)

As festival designer Ming Cho Lee explained:

With the new playwrights, the whole direction of the theater changed. Joe changed direction... The Public Theater became more important than the Delacorte. The new playwrights became more interesting to Joe than Shakespeare. (192)

At a time when good American playwrights seemed to be an endangered species, Joe believed that the playwrights were there but adventurous producers were not. In an article from TIME Magazine in 1972 he said, "There are more new plays worthy of production than can be produced in the U.S. I've got five theaters [in the downtown complex], and I don't have enough space to do the plays I could do in a season here" (Joe). In the same article he proclaimed himself "the most important producer on Broadway, Off-Broadway – in the U.S." He was right. What made him so successful? He knew how to nurture playwrights, and typically received 40 – 50 new scripts each week; all were read by trusted staff members who filtered the best through to him; he was a Creative Producer.

Joe exerted an enormous amount of influence over every script he decided to produce. Each one bears his signature imprint of energy, openness and diversity. The Public Theater became a writer's company, true to Joe's original vision. "Any theater to be alive has to be a writer's theater," he believed. Under Papp's extraordinary care, the Public produced many original plays and musicals – the best-known are *Hair*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*, and especially *A Chorus Line*. In Todd London's book *Outrageous Fortune*, London says:

Papp's Public Theater became a vibrant hothouse for theatrical experimentation.... He described the purity of Papp's vision for the Public as follows: 'We do things that nobody else would produce. We don't do things that Broadway does.'

The body of work produced by Papp is unequalled in the history of the American theatre. The Public's buoyant atmosphere gave artists the oxygen they needed to grow and experiment, whatever the result. Producer Elizabeth McCann remembers the chaotic, fertile, energetic community Papp oversaw at the Public, and feeling the 'vibrant sense that anything could happen in this place.' (London 9-10)

*A Chorus Line* broke new boundaries and created a new theatre-making model: the workshop. Originating with dancers' reminiscences overseen by director and choreographer Michael Bennett, Papp as producer gave the creative team time and space to develop their story using a new collaborative model. This workshop system for developing musicals, which Bennett and Papp pioneered, revolutionized the way Broadway musicals were created thereafter, and many of the precedents for workshops' aesthetics and contract agreements were set by Papp, Bennett and "A Chorus Line." "Workshopping" a play or musical is now one of the standard tools a producer uses in the development process, and the collaborative contributions of every artist in the room – director, music director, actors, etc. – is so important that the team shares in the royalty pool as co-creators of the script (a generous move also originating with Papp). As an artist, Joe knew that creating good work took time; as a producer he was determined to give it space as well.

When *Hair* moved to Broadway Joe Papp had released his rights to the show, a mistake that he didn't make with *A Chorus Line*. When that show transferred uptown to Broadway, it became a continual financial revenue stream that supported the Public's other work. *A Chorus Line* ran for 6,137 performances and became the longest-running production in Broadway history at that time; it received 12 Tony Award nominations in 1975, and won nine of them (including Best Musical of the Year).

Thanks to the artistic and commercial success of *A Chorus Line*, Papp now had the freedom to care even less about the necessity of staging plays to generate profit. Although profit continued to come his way: to date The Public Theater has won 42 Tony Awards, 151 Obies, 41 Drama Desk Awards, and four Pulitzer Prizes. Fifty-four Public Theater productions have moved to Broadway, including *Sticks and Bones*, *That Championship Season*, *A Chorus Line*, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Tempest*, *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*; *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *Take Me Out*, *Caroline, or Change*, *Passing Strange*, *Hair*, *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Normal Heart*. David Rabe, Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline and Suzan Lori-Parks are a few of the outstanding artists that were first discovered at the Public Theater.

Joe Papp was a visionary producer who died in 1991. He has inspired a new generation of producers that continue to pump that same creative energy and dedication into both the commercial and nonprofit sectors. The Commercial Theater Institute (CTI), run by The Broadway League, is the world's foremost training center for commercial producers. It helps new producers understand that their primary contribution will not only be to a production's bottom line, but to the overall quality and artistic value of theatre in America.. As Jordon Roth, producer and president of Jujamcyn Theaters, tells students at CTI, advises, "Honor the Legacy. Deliver It Forward."

Historical precedence tells us that producers with artistic integrity, like Joe Papp and Cheryl Crawford, have been able to succeed in the commercial world. In the next chapter I will discuss the importance that dramaturgy plays in the creation of new work in the nonprofit theater.

## Chapter 4

### PRODUCING NEW WORK IN THE NONPROFIT THEATRE

*Great theatres have always had their playwrights. Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Moliere, Ibsen – all these were men around whom theatrical companies were functioning. The Moscow Art Theatre had Chekhov; the Abbey Theatre had Yeats, Synge and O’Casey; the Provincetown had O’Neill; the Group had Odets. We must have our new playwrights, and we will not have them unless we give them many outlets to see their plays produced. This is the best way in which they can learn to write better plays.*

-Margo Jones

The Regional Theater Movement that began with Margo Jones in 1947 gained momentum, and by the 1960s saw the greatest expansion of the American theatre outside New York since the nineteenth century. The Ford Foundation in 1959 made sizable grants to a number of small companies across the country, and this financial boost allowed theaters such as the Alley Theatre in Houston, the Arena Stage in Washington D.C., and others to become fully professional and relatively stable. Tyrone Guthrie strengthened the movement toward resident companies with his theater in Minneapolis, and by 1966 more actors were being employed by the thirty-five or so regional theaters than were being employed in New York City. The regional boom had begun.

Before the Ford Foundation grants, unless a resident theater had a certain angel for support they were completely dependent upon box office revenue. As Diana Ragsdale quotes Zelda Fichandler, Artistic Director and Founder of Arena Stage:

The fabric of thought that propelled us was that theatre should stop serving the function of making money, for which it has never been and never will be suited, and start serving the revelation and shaping

of the process of living, for which it is uniquely suited, for which it, indeed, exists. The new thought was that theatre should be restored to itself as a form of art. Perhaps we should simply call ourselves art theatres...

There's an expressive word, I believe it's Sanskrit – and the word is *apava* that translates as “the effective means to make a vision concrete” or workable or real. Our *apava*, strangely enough, turned out to be the nonprofit corporation... Before nineteen hundred and fifty-something, theatre was excluded from the benefits given to science, universities, charities, the church, opera, and maybe dance – but not theatre, because it made a profit. We knew that without the nonprofit blanket we could not exist, for it allows us to receive gifts and grants and to be free of taxes on tickets. (Ragsdale 45)

In the early sixties, revolution of any sort was fashionable. The artistic revolution that was in full force in the early sixties embraced an alternate set of values that went beyond the profit model. It became very trendy to start a theatre company, and many were formed at this time. What the Ford Foundation grants, followed by federal, corporate and private grants, did was to provide enough support to allow authentic artistic exploration and production. They changed the game of theatre making in the United States. What was being sought was an alternate model of theatre, an experimental environment centered around the creation of new work that supported discussion, collaboration and innovation; its inspiration was rooted more in the European model of theatre than the American, for-profit commercial model. Under the nonprofit status these alternative models of theater now had an alternative mode of support.

Sometimes this alternative world was difficult to enter into by those not accustomed to engaging in a different artistic process. One example was the Lincoln Center Theater, that Robert Brustein described as “a nonprofit theater unfortunately run by people who



had nothing but profit experience: Eliz Kazan and Robert Whitehead, with Bobby Lewis doing the teaching” (Ragsdale 47). Those on the nonprofit side were afraid that American theater would move away from the idealism that originated the Regional Theater Movement, back toward the more commercial mode of production. The ideological barriers between the commercial and nonprofit worlds were being established, and would prove difficult to break.

Like Lessing two centuries before, Margo Jones in her book *Theatre in the Round*, published in 1951, foresaw in the Regional Theater Movement the potential of a new American theater. In her book she writes:

I believe it is imperative in creating new resident professional companies to take a violent stand about the choice of plays. Personally I believe in the production of classics and new scripts, with emphasis on new scripts. Our theatre can never be stronger than the quality of its plays..... The production of classics is healthy, but ...We need progress, and the seed of progress lies in the new plays. (Jones 24)

The American theatre was on the verge of an explosion of new plays and playwrights. Although the sixties' saw much creative ensemble work from directors like Joseph Chaiken, Jerzy Grotowski, and Richard Schechner, they offered little support to playwrights using a more traditional model of writing. Off-Off-Broadway, Café Cino, Café La MaMa and others provided safe havens for Sam Shepard, John Guare and Lanford Wilson, but few others. However, now supported by federal grants, the regional theatre movement could begin to support and to encourage emerging writers and their work, but would have to find a new model of play development.

Two organizations led the way: the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center and New Dramatists. These were the first institutions to define their primary missions as the encouragement and development of new playwrights. They were also the first to see

themselves as a kind of theatrical laboratory where new and experimental work could be nurtured, and soon invited professional actors, directors, designers and dramaturgs into the experimental process. A new model of play development was being invented.

In the nonprofit theatre, the producorial role is replaced by that of the artistic director. He is the one who chooses the scripts, starts the process, sets the tone and asks the questions about the script. However, this function is also shared with the literary advisor, who reads through hundreds of scripts each year and who funnels the best, most interesting and most relevant on to the artistic director. It is the artistic director/producer that is the leader of the institution, as the legendary artistic director Zelda Fichandler explained:

A theatre institution, in and of itself, is an artwork, a collaborative artwork whose principal artist is the artistic director. The artwork is not truly alive until it meets its audience, so that we absolutely want and must have the audience with us, responding with their imagination and belief. But it is we who choose and create the work. Neither Picasso nor Beethoven asked anyone what they wanted to see or hear. That comes from deep within each individual artist. The artist may be lonely or feel unsure of, or inadequate to, what she is making, but she must cling to her integrity – her wholeness – and see it through. Being an artistic director, like growing old, is not for sissies. (Ragsdale 49)

Once selected, typically a new script will be assigned a dramaturg to guide the playwright through the rehearsal process and to facilitate the conversations between the playwright and the director. The dramaturg has varying functions during the play development process. Robert Brustein is generally credited with bringing the term

*dramaturg* from Europe to the Yale School of Drama; he saw the need in the new theatre movement to have someone on staff with a knowledge of theatre history and world repertoire, an expert who could help the artistic director create an overall vision and implement it with the choice of plays and approach to production. The dramaturg is the one who holds the playwright's hand as the play is being developed; he listens to her, helps her clarify her thoughts, and provides an objective view that incorporates the overall aims of the entire team in an evaluation of the work at each stage of development. As Michael Bigelow Dixon, former Literary Manager at Actor's Theatre of Louisville, explains, the dramaturg "concentrates on the text, its thematic possibilities, structural characteristics, sources and references, its history and development, and its expression and fulfillment of the playwright's ideas" (Jonas 413).

The dramaturgical process, as found in the nonprofit theatre today, is comparable to the play development process found within the commercial theatre. In the 1997 book *Dramaturgy in American Theatre*, Dixon stresses that the importance of the dramaturgical dialogue in new play development is underscored by two primary principles: 1) that the playwright controls what belongs in the script; and 2) the playwright has the right to be consulted on all major creative decisions. All dramaturgical dialogue is a search for collaboration between all the individual artists in the room that create a series of metaphors that can guide the work and unify the entire production. The dramaturg facilitates and leads this discussion.

Dramaturgical methodology begins by reading the script several times, taking notes of those valuable first impressions, and then discussing the play with other people. Dixon then reviews this information with the playwright in a type of Socratic dialogue that reveals important clues about his intentions and process. He poses questions like:

- Why was the play written and when was it started?
- How many drafts are there and would it be a good idea for me to read earlier versions?
- Have there been readings or workshops, and what was learned from those?

- What should I read and whom should I talk with to understand more about the world of the play? (Jonas 413)

In speaking with the playwright, he asks him if he has any questions about his own work, or if he needs any assistance in preparation for rehearsals. Writers usually need help with something, and this then opens up room for discussion.

Dixon also brought up six rules, or tips, of new play dramaturgy, which I have paraphrased below:

**Rule #1:** Take your cue from the playwright; the practice of new play dramaturgy involves not only experience and analysis, but diplomacy as well.

**Rule #2:** Avoid irrevocable mistakes. Dramaturgical collaboration requires trust; when that trust is compromised, it's not easy to recover. Generally, it's wise to consider the playwright the indisputable authority on the text. Your questions and his answers begin the dialectic that is the dramaturgical dialogue.

**Rule #3:** Praise is always welcome, but critical inquiries should be specific and posed as questions.

**Rule #4:** Discussing process relieves anxiety. Playwrights need to know what's going on at each stage of production, and knowing the director's rehearsal schedule allows important textual questions to be addressed beforehand.

**Rule #5:** Ask the playwright to articulate what he wants to achieve, and also what he wants to avoid in production.

**Rule #6:** Analyze the text. Ask the playwright questions like:

- How does the structure facilitate the progression of action?
- Is the structure efficient?
- Is the sequencing effective?

- Are arguments, motivations, revelations, images, and turning points clear? Or, if desired, are they clearly ambiguous rather than vague? (Jonas 414 - 415)

These questions will spark conversations about the play's unifying metaphors, themes, and ideas, and may evolve into discussions about analysis of character journeys, development of style, event, or structure. As the directors and designers are brought into the conversation, the dramaturgical dialogue expands to become more production-specific. When rehearsals begin, the dramaturgy then centers around what remains unclear, what's extraneous, what's missing, and focuses on structure and interpretation.

Each person's dramaturgy remains uniquely theirs; however, the outlined process, drawn from Dixon's experience while working with the Actor's Theatre of Louisville, effectively serves the production, the play, and the playwright, and is more or less typical of production dramaturgy throughout the nonprofit theatre.

The important thing to recognize about dramaturgy is that dramaturgical skill is demonstrated through process. Fundamental to the dramaturg's work is the conviction that research and intellectual activity inspire the making of theater. Intellectual efforts and creative process are inseparable. Dramaturgical collaboration is built on the belief that consciousness expands an artist's tools, that understanding history and responding to context can only enrich everyone's understanding and release surprising, unexpected ideas. Lynn Thomson, in her book *Between The Lines*, says:

Collaboration was reiterated as our major tool and goal, and to my surprise, I found definitions of that process remarkably consistent. Dramaturgs immerse themselves in big ideas and small tasks, and try to keep the two connected. I was constantly reminded that dramaturgy itself is about inciting change, and so replicates any creative process, which is about change, the movement from question to discovery. I was affirmed in my own conviction that true collaborative dialogue demands a high tolerance for open spaces,

advanced skills in uncertainty, a hunger for the question and a commitment to surpass what is routine. (Thomson 169)

Anne Cattaneo, the dramaturg for Lincoln Center, gives an illustration on how research fashions rehearsal. When asked by a young director how ideas discovered during research actually reach the stage, Sir Richard Eyre, a noted English film, theatre, television and opera director, advised:

Sit down with your leading actor and designer and dramaturg and read the play, and ask of every line, every word, 'what does it mean?' Which means, 'what does it mean to US?' If you do that, and it will take you several months – and you will not be paid to do it – all your ideas will get on the stage. (Thomson 233)

That's the best example of how production dramaturgy works in the theater today. Of course, as stated before, dramaturgy has always been a necessary developmental tool and has been performed by actors, directors, producers and play doctors. Mark Bly, Senior Dramaturg and Director of New Play Development at the Alley Theatre in Houston, had the good fortune to work alongside Zelda Fichandler during his early years at the Arena Stage. He says:

Zelda always understood what was needed: she could diagnose the problem, pull back and describe the intention of the playwright, then describe what she was seeing, and identify through the comparison what the director needed to do. From her, I started to learn that as a dramaturg, it is not enough to just diagnose... [You must move on] to figuring out solutions. (Thomson 305)

Although the nonprofit theatre's intent was to produce an alternate model of theatre making into this country, working from a nonprofit base does come with restrictions, the biggest being that regional theatres must work within the time limitations of a season. In *Outrageous Fortune*, one playwright who has extensive experience in working in both the profit and nonprofit sectors explains the situation:

This model – where all these theatres are going to get buildings, and then buildings are going to have seasons, and that's the way you should run a theatre – has some drawbacks. There is a certain beauty in the commercial system, though it doesn't happen much anymore with straight plays. A producer only does what he or she is passionate about, and works on that show and tries to get that show in... Yes, commercial producers generally have a number of projects, but they commit to the projects because those are the ones they're passionate about. As opposed to, "I have eight slots to fill."

The need to fill these slots can be counterproductive because people do things not just out of passion, but just because they've got to put something in there.... And that person ... maybe wasn't really that excited about your play, but just thought it was okay. (London 34)

There are other criticisms of the nonprofit theatres: that huge institutions isolate the artistic directors from the playwrights themselves, using literary managers as buffers; since most artistic directors are directors themselves, more energy and resources are invested in their projects and other productions receive a more watered-down collaboration process; and finally, since artistic directors don't control the budget, marketing, fundraising, and even certain production choices often have to be compromised with those who do.

The issue ultimately is about focus and risk. How can a nonprofit producer/artistic director give their primary focus to each current project while constantly looking ahead to the next one, and then the next? Risk enters into the picture when an artistic director, constrained by his Board of Directors, must constantly consider the financial implications of each production within a season and, ultimately, his own paycheck. This need for security is risk averse and antithetical to the artistic process. In *Outrageous Fortune* one commercial producer recounts a conversation with a nonprofit manager who has served in the same theatre for thirty years:

“Do you know what that means that you’ve had a weekly paycheck for thirty years? How many producers and/or managers in this business can make that statement?” Ultimately the producer concluded: “That security that he had under him made him afraid of challenge. Security doesn’t reinforce you to the extent that, listen, I’m secure so I can afford to lose. No, it makes you afraid that you will lose. And I think, probably that happens with artistic directors.”  
(London 35-36)

And this risk aversion to the creative process has often compromised the original vision of the founders of the movement. Many leaders from both sectors agree that the nonprofit theater has lost its way, and more and more nonprofits are imitating the commercial theatre, which is the model they fought so desperately to get away from in the first place.

Drawing on the dramaturgy of the most impactful producers and artistic directors like Margo Jones and Zelda Fichandler, as well as the processes of noted dramaturgs like Brustein, Dixon, Bly and Cattaneo, the new Creative Producer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is backed up by theatrical precedents that clearly show the importance of going beyond the profit motive to create great theatre in the nonprofit world. Seeing its success in the nonprofit Dramaturgy is a useful tool that is being used by more and more Creative Producers in the commercial world as well.



## Chapter 5

### PRODUCING AND DRAMATURGING NEW WORK IN THE COMMERCIAL THEATRE

*Commercial is the ultimate value of making an important contribution.*

-Kevin McCollum, Broadway producer

During the 1960s, while the Regional Theatre Movement was quickly growing across the country, in New York City the Off-Broadway movement was gaining momentum with productions at City Center and Lincoln Center, American Repertory Company, Circle in the Square, Phoenix Theatre, and the Living Theatre. Joe Cino and his Café Cino, Joe Papp at the Public Theater, and Ellen Stewart's La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club diversified the city's theatrical palate even more when the Off-Broadway theatres began to feel economic constraints, giving rise to the Off-Off-Broadway movement. By 1969, La MaMa alone produced more plays than were seen uptown on Broadway that year. Although often amateurish, the determined pursuit of novelty and the lack of standards to judge them gave many talented writers a chance to freely experiment and thrive.

From the 1920's to the 1950's, the height of the commercial theater in New York, it was primarily the domain of the producer to do all of the early developmental work for a new play. The legendary producers of the past, many of whom had been directors, were all theatre-makers, not just financiers. Back then the producer was the person who controlled the show; productions were not put together by committees of producers, executive producers, associate producers, agents and entrepreneurs like they are today. Producers and playwrights had working relationships with each other built on trust. For instance, as Lillian Hellman finished each script she passed it on to Herman Shumlin, who in turn produced it. The show was taken out of town for tryouts, script changes were made by the playwright, producer, and director – sometimes joined by a “play doctor” - in smoky motel rooms at night and put into the show the next day to see how the audience would react. That was the extent of play “development” during Broadway’s heyday.

Those days are long gone. In a commercial world where roughly seven out of ten new works won't earn back any return on investment (known as recouping), no independent commercial producer has enough power and money to take a script to Broadway simply because it reads well. Out-of-town tryouts are too expensive, and have been replaced by industry readings and workshops to garner interest from other producers and potential investors as well as to aid in the development process. Only after successful audience feedback from these early exposures will a commercial producer think about staging a full production, usually in a professional not-for-profit theater, either in New York or elsewhere. Times, and financing, have changed.

The prohibitive cost of bringing a new play into the commercial world, which usually means New York City, is caused primarily by two things: unions and real estate. There are, incredibly, fourteen labor unions that exert an influence over production costs in New York City commercial theatre (not listed in any specific order):

1. Actors' Equity Association (AEA)
2. Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC)
3. The Dramatists Guild

4. American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA)
5. American Federation of Musicians (AFM)
6. Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers (ATPAM)
7. International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE)
8. Local 764 Theatrical Wardrobe Union Local 764 (IATSE)
9. Makeup Artists-Hair Stylists Union Local 798 (IATSE),
10. Motion Picture Projectionists, Operators, Video Technicians, Theatrical Employees & Allied Crafts local 306 (IATSE)
11. Theatrical Protective Union Stage Hands Local 1 (IATSE),
12. Treasurers & Ticket Sellers Union Local 751 (IATSE)
13. Local United Scenic Artists (USA) 829 (IATSE)
14. Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ Theatre Division (SEIU)

These coalitions represent some 75,000 members of the Broadway and Off-Broadway community, as well as employees of Radio City Music Hall, City Center, Lincoln Center, and Madison Square Garden. On the other side of the labor union equation stands The Broadway League, which represents producers and theatre owners' interests in negotiations affecting theatrical presentations on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and in national touring productions. The impact of these labor unions and the Broadway League on the rise of production costs and on ticket prices touches everyone who attends a commercial theatre production.

As to the costs of real estate, there are no published numbers, but according to producer Ken Davenport, most Broadway shows cost between \$300,000 and \$600,000 to run *each week*, with the bulk of the costs going to advertising and theater rental. As Davenport says, "At 1,500 seats, do the math." The majority of Broadway theaters are owned or managed by three organizations: the Shubert Organization, which owns seventeen theaters; the Nederlander Organization, which controls nine theaters; and Jujamcyn Theaters, which owns five Broadway houses. A "Broadway" house is defined by theaters having more than 500 seats, whether the address is located within the region

between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Streets on New York City's west side or not. Some "Broadway" shows are also produced by non-commercial houses as part of their subscription season; these are the Lincoln Center Theater, the Roundabout Theatre Company, and the Manhattan Theatre Club.

At these prices it is a wonder why the entire structure doesn't self-implode; but it does explain the somewhat unnerving "touristy" vibe that Times Square has each evening after the theaters let out. According to The Broadway League, in 2011 total attendance on Broadway was 12.13 million people, approximately 62% of whom were tourists, identified as non-NYC residents who said that Broadway was a very important reason in their decision to visit NYC. Furthermore, during the 2010-11 season, Broadway's economic impact added \$11.2 billion to the total New York City economy. Specifically, this amount was composed of direct spending by producers to mount and run shows, spending by theater owners to maintain and renovate venues, and ancillary purchases by Broadway tourists. This represented a 9% increase from the previous year.

Obviously the Broadway "product" is big business for everyone concerned – producers, artists, labor, theater management, and city government. But what is being contributed culturally? If the Broadway "brand" seems to suggest superior quality in public perception, what is the superior product that's being infused into our culture and theatrical canon? And what does the intense economic pressure do to creative collaboration within the commercial environment?

In the commercial theatre world there is rarely a dramaturg involved in the development of new work. Typically, a producer becomes acquainted with a playwright or a new play from seeing a reading, a workshop or a festival production, or from a recommendation by a director or other trusted source, and tries to secure the option from the playwright to produce it. From there, dramaturgy – and by that I mean the creative process and philosophy of how we make theatre happen – is performed by everyone involved with the project. The director' dramaturgy is executed by a team of designers and actors; along with the playwright, his dramaturgical function is to expose the meaning of the play and create a world or context through which it can be experienced by the

audience. The Creative Producer's dramaturgy is reflected in his decision to produce the play in the first place. His philosophy, his dramaturgy, about the work informs his conversations with each new addition to the production team: casting directors, actors, marketing professionals, even down to the house and box office management. It is his clear understanding of what the play is and why it is important that drives each business decision.

An example of this kind of creative producer is Jack Viertel, who is unusual because he got his start as an institutional dramaturg at the Mark Taper Forum in LA after having spent a few years as a theatre critic. Viertel believes that his background as a theatre critic and dramaturg informs what he does as a producer. As a former dramaturg it is easy for him to watch development with a critical, detached eye:

You get seduced by the rehearsal process. I've tried to remain outside that process as much as it seems healthy because it's important to retain an objective view. Because I spent all those years trying to write articulately about what worked and didn't work in plays, I feel a responsibility as a producer to retain that articulateness to the degree that I have any and to communicate with the artists. (Dorbian 49)

Jack Viertel exemplifies the concept of a Creative Producer, and expands the definition and uses of dramaturgy into his criteria for booking a project into a Jujamcyn theater:

"[When choosing a project to produce], there are four or five things I really focus on to try to figure out if something can work," notes Viertel. "First of all, is it a story that delivers to the audience what the audience came to get? That's criterion number one. Criterion number two: does it, like *Angels in America* ... interface with the

world that we live in a way that people are already talking about or that they want to talk about? Does it have the opportunity to be newsy in that way? Number three: Does it have a role in it that will either give a star, or someone who will give a star performance, an opportunity to give a live performance that people will want to see? Finally, is it a manageable financial arrangement that can be made? In other words, it's very hard to produce a play that has thirty-five people in it, or a play that has extraordinary theatrical demands, unless you can figure out how to do them in a reasonable amount of time and for a reasonable amount of money." (Dorbian 49)

For this dramaturg-turned-creative producer, what he enjoys most about his job is the creative process. When he becomes interested in a project, if it's a play he'll call the agent's playwright; but if it's a musical he'll come up with the idea first and decide who will write it, in what style it will be written, and who will direct it. Producing a musical on Broadway is more "proactive" than producing a play, explains Viertel, because usually plays are usually imported from somewhere.

Why is the process different for musicals? "It's because no one is prepared to take the risk of producing a play cold on Broadway when you don't have to. If I read a script that I'm interested in, I can get on the phone with the Seattle Repertory Theatre and ask them if they want to do this together, and for the fraction of the price, you'll find out whether it's as good as you think it is. So why would you not take advantage of that?" (Dorbian 52).

What makes a good producer? For Viertel the quick answer is "taste, energy, passion, and access to money." However when speaking about the possible contribution a producer can make into our larger world his response is more thoughtful:

I think that the one thing that many, many producers lack is any real dramaturgical skills, which can be learned. There are structured and

emotional ways of telling a story that are not rocket science. They are a little bit mysterious, but they're really not; it takes time and effort to learn where things go right and where they go wrong. In my experience that's the area [I specialize in]... But that's an area where I'm working with producers who don't really get it. They are very good at other things, like raising money. They understand marketing and advertising... But I do understand when a story is going wrong and how it's going wrong" (Dobrian 50).

There are two important points that Jack Viertel makes. One is the necessity for commercial producers to understand the role of the not-for-profit theaters in new play development. The second is the advantage the knowledge of dramaturgy gave him as a Creative Producer in the commercial theater.

In my own experience in the commercial world, the producers I've come in contact with have been intrigued with the value dramaturgy may add to their projects, and use the word sometimes without possessing a clear understanding of what dramaturgy is and exactly how it works. As Viertel says, some of them just don't "get it." Norman Frisch, an independent dramaturg and performance curator who studied management at the Yale School of Drama early in his career, says:

... having producers in the room during a developmental process can be problematic for many artists, especially in situations ... [when they] have their own relationship to the artists and expectations for the completed work. The challenge becomes how to give these people – their visions, their needs – the appropriate weight... A dramaturg with a producerial consciousness then becomes a very useful collaborator to have in the room. (Thomson 274)

Putting it another way, a Creative Producer with a dramaturgical consciousness is also a very useful collaborator to have in the room.

“One of the tragedies here,” a Broadway insider laments, “is the disappearance of the truly knowledgeable, experienced, passionate producer of material. What you have are tons and tons of investors” (London 37). These investor-producers are what Creative Producers refer to as “Above-The-Title Producers” – that is, producers whose contributions to a production are limited only to raising enough money to get their name above the title on the producer credits. The traditional producer/playwright intimate relationship has now been broken, that so many plays begin their lives elsewhere. Says another producer:

I have good relationships with playwrights, but I don't sit around with them and go through drafts. Most people who put on plays have different relationships with their writers now than writers did with their producers twenty years ago... We're packagers now...[We] put people together and package it. (London 37)

Packaging a new play or musical today involves doing readings and workshops. An intimate table read just for the creative team still involves hiring a director and Equity actors, but is useful to begin the dramaturgical process to discover what works and doesn't work in a new script. Later staged readings are produced for industry-only invited audiences to test-drive the new material, with extensive rewrites following. After a few readings the script may be workshoped further. Shelby Jiggetts-Tivony, Director of Creative Development at Walt Disney Productions, explains the differences between readings and workshops:

A reading is doing the play as is. A workshop is an opportunity to explore and to open the piece up, give the writer strong dramaturgical support – maybe see the play on its feet – in the hopes that the writer



can discover something else about it and do some significant rewriting. A workshop isn't just the play I read. We hope it becomes stronger, knows more about itself... Originally, development was about exposing theatres to new writers, and new writers to audiences, but over time has become a substitute for producing. (Thomson 253-54)

A Creative Producer is intimately involved in and guides the entire process. Says another producer, "If I believe in a writer, I'm not going to just believe in him for two years (the length of an option), I'm going to believe in him long enough to produce his work and then fifteen years later to produce the revival" (McCollum 94).

More and more, producers are looking to defray the exorbitant costs involved in developing new work by co-producing new plays and musicals with nonprofit theaters, and collaborating with the nonprofit's artistic process to create art for the commercial sector.

## Chapter 6

### MEETING IN THE MIDDLE:

#### COMMERCIAL PRODUCERS WORKING WITH NONPROFITS

*What I'm trying to say is that there are certain ideals that were constructed for the nonprofit theater, which I have not heard a word about in the last two days. We all deviate from the ideals – ideals are meant to deviate from. But you have to know what*

*they are in order to deviate from them. And what I'm not hearing is the fact that there was a time when we were different theaters, we did different things. We didn't join together to do the same things to please the largest number, to bring in the greatest amount of money, and the greatest subscribers. We did, as a nonprofit theater, most of ... these things because nobody else would do them!*

-Bob Brustein

Given the economic constraints of the professional theatre in New York, more and more commercial producers are turning to the nonprofit world to partner with them in developing new work. This collaboration bridges the gap that has historically divided the two separate worlds of theatre, the for-profit commercial model and the nonprofit regional model. Since the advent of the Regional Theater Movement in the 1960s, there has been distrust between the two camps; however, given that the National Endowment for the Arts and such major funding from corporate and individual grants have steadily eroded in recent years, the nonprofit world is increasingly eyeing the revenues earned in the commercial world as necessary to sustain the life of their institutions. The commercial world is looking for the professional companies at our regional institutions for support – financial and otherwise – to bring productions to Broadway. One hand seems to wash the other, but some feel that such partnerships betray the regional model too much.

The first step into this intersection was the production of *Big River* in 1984. Originally commissioned by Broadway producer Rocco Landesman, the musical was developed in conjunction with the American Repertory Theatre in Boston and the La Jolla Playhouse near San Diego. This commingling of effort has now become more and more common, and, in the commercial world, acceptable; however, on the nonprofit side there have been significant rumblings. The Center for the Theater Commons commissioned Diana Ragsdale to write a report trend, inviting voices from both worlds to weigh in on this practice, their doubts, and its challenges. The report, *In The Intersection*, is at the time of this writing (May 2013) the subject of much discourse. On November 4-5, 2011, twenty-five theater professional gathered in Washington D.C. for a meeting, hosted by the American Voices New Play Institute (AVNPI) at Arena Stage, to discuss nonprofit and

commercial collaborations aimed at the development of new theatrical work. This was the third time that this agenda was discussed, the other two times being in June 1974 at Princeton University with 224 participants and in 2000 at Harvard University. Although the original 1974 convening was highly contentious, attitudes had changed by 2000, where alliances between commercial producers and nonprofit theatres had become business-as-usual. The 2011 gathering was kept deliberately small, unlike the previous gatherings, because of budgetary constraints (it was funded by the AVNPI) and because it was hoped that the size and makeup of the group would encourage forthright conversation and provide the time and space for thoughtful discussion of complex issues. The primary goals of the meeting were: 1) to understand how commercial/nonprofit partnerships, particularly those centered on the development of new work, had evolved in recent years; and 2) to discuss the impact of shifts in practice on those regularly engaged in such collaborations.

If there was a theme to the entire meeting, it was that the nonprofit theatre appears to have lost sight of its values and purpose. Collaborations and partnerships with commercial producers have brought enhancement income, royalties, Tony awards, celebrity guests, and other important measures of success to their institutions. Although beneficial, there were definite concerns: the goals of the institution and commercial producers can be at odds; the costs and risks associated with enhancement deals are escalating; artists are put in the position of serving two masters; the prospects of a potential Broadway run can change the artistic process and product; and that partnerships between the two could create a legal and moral slippery slope for nonprofits.

The discussion began with Gregory Mosher, former head of the nonprofit Lincoln Center Theater (LCT), telling Rocco Landesman, former Broadway producer, that from the perspective of twenty years later, he was right. Landesman had said twenty years ago that when success in a nonprofit theater leads to commercial success and all the bells and whistles that go with it, that success can become like a drug. Institutions can get hooked on it, for themselves, their artists and their boards, and can forget about their institutional mission “to create theatrical *art*.” By the time he left Lincoln Center in 2004,

Mosher had thrown out the subscription model, concentrated on fostering new playwrights and attracting new audiences, and had raised LCT's annual income to almost \$45 million. Using the drug metaphor and acknowledging that institutions can become dependent on the rewards and legitimacy that accrue with commercial success, Mosher told the gathering:

It's fun to sit in the fifth row on the aisle at the Tony awards. Your board members look at you in a different way. You know, a year ago you were a punk [*laughter from the rest of the room*] telling them they had absolutely no say about the theater. And then after they see you on TV, they think you know something. You didn't know anything, but now you're in your tuxedo!...So you, they, you get addicted to it.  
(Ragsdale 32)

His words acknowledge his belief that Rocco Landesman had been right about the nonprofit theatre suffering from an "identity crisis". Landesman then took the opportunity to remind everyone at the Arena that nonprofit theater was supposed to be an *alternative* to Broadway, to do *riskier* work, not catering to the marketplace. He felt that an increasing number of nonprofit theaters across the country were now hoping to create the next *Rent*, *A Chorus Line*, or *Jersey Boys*.

There was a sense that regional theaters were not living up to their original purposes. They were not taking the artistic risks they were created to take, not existing primarily for their local communities, and not upholding alternative measures of success to those espoused by the commercial theater. All agreed that the larger culture has been less supportive of the nonprofit theater, and out of necessity the nonprofit theatre has turned toward the market to survive. Michael David, a producer at Dodger Theatricals, spoke of his own transition from the nonprofit to the commercial arena:

When we started [in nonprofit theatre], government funding went from \$5,000 to \$60,000 to \$300,000... And then suddenly, these partners who were complicit in our existence, national and local governments, foundations...before we all drank the Kool-Aid [of support]...those complicit partners pulled out the rug. They abandoned us. Now, you know, in the end we just decided, “Hell, we’re not going to go begging anymore.” We turned to the dark side. [Laughter] They started something they couldn’t finish and they went away. (Ragsdale 37)

At which point Oskar Eustis of The Public Theater, said, “The whole *culture* did that!” There was a collective sense that the ideology of the past forty years was gone. The artistic revolution was over, and now the nonprofit theater must reclaim its identity, distinct from the commercial theater, to survive.

Today it is financial necessity that is driving the commercial and nonprofit theaters together. Rising production costs are forcing commercial producers to find an alternative to what used to be known as the “out-of-town tryout” or the Off-Broadway run, the previous avenues to test new works, especially new musicals. They began to approach the nonprofit theaters armed with royalties and advance funding to cover costs (now called enhancements) at the same time the private foundations and the NEA began to pull away their support. Without the income offered by the commercial producers, many of these institutions would have sustained major damage to their institutional missions. However, money is not – and was not then – the primary motivation for the partnership. There were also long-established artistic relationships between individuals that wanted to work together. Producers offered projects that the nonprofits wanted to produce for their subscriber base anyway. Regional theaters wanted the validation that commercial success brings to an institution. There were many reasons cited for the partnerships, but above all people cited the cultural shifts that were taking place in our country, a shift away from theatre as an art form. On this both camps could readily agree. As Sue Frost, a

commercial producer said, “The reality is we need each other to do *anything* now” (Ragsdale 40).

There seem to be two types of deals going on regarding the creation of new work between the sectors: 1) those initiated by commercial producers who have the relationship to an artist, or property rights, and who are seeking a nonprofit theater at which to do a pre-Broadway tryout or a developmental production; and 2) those initiated by nonprofits that have a relationship to an artist, or property rights, and who are seeking a commercial partnership to support the development of a work and/or a Broadway transfer of a work once it is completed. Either deal may involve the exchange of property rights or income from enhancements or royalties. Concerns center around artistic control, loyalty to their communities, and the impact of the partnership on the artistic process and product. Commercial producer Margo Lion voiced her concern:

It’s important for a commercial producer to select [a nonprofit to work with], not just according to who has an open *slot*, who has an appropriate space, and who has the money...; but rather, who is going to be your... *creative partner* in this? (Ragsdale 18)

Nonprofits do not want to be in a position of losing control over the creative control and process. They still strongly believe in keeping to their institutional missions, which could theoretically jeopardize their nonprofit status. Also, when problems arise the commercial producers typically wish to postpone development, which is a problem when the nonprofit has already built the production into its season. Nonprofits have a responsibility to their institution, while commercial producers have a responsibility to the author and investors – two divergent goals.

It seems that if American theatre is to survive at this point in history, collaborations must be made and partnerships must be formed. If our common goal is to create significant new works of theatre that excite, express and reflect who we are as a culture at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then that is the endpoint toward which all discussions

should lead. We need new ideals and principles to guide us down new paths, and new leaders to blaze the trail for others to follow. As Broadway producer Sue Frost says:

The commercial and nonprofit theatres have common priorities: artist support, long-term development of new work, and audiences for that work. The two sectors need to work toward transparency around expectations, examining definitions of “success,” strengthening tolerance for risk, and more clearly defining the research and development, manufacturing, and distribution processes at the intersection. (Ragsdale 25)

There’s not a consensus on this issue; it is still being debated in public forums, on the internet, and in private meeting rooms all over this country. There is a certain blurring of the lines going on in this intersection; yet, there is a growing concern that this is an important conversation to have. As Margo Lion said at the conference, “[We have] an imperative to grow the audience demographic because this country is changing and we will not have anyone going to the theater if we don’t make that a top concern“ (Ragsdale 156).

Yet, co-producing with a nonprofit can be beneficial to both parties. The nonprofit receives enhancement money that contributes to the stability of the institution and the recognition and prestige that commercial success brings; the commercial producer gets to try out their new play or musical material at a considerable discount before a paying audience. Brustein acknowledges the temptations of working on a Broadway-bound production for a nonprofit theater:

You get the taste of it in your mouth and you want more of it. And gradually you’re growing out of your old commitment to a collective ideal, your idealism, and you’re being.... Essentially you’re becoming a Broadway producer. (Ragsdale 23)

Broadway is also appealing for both commercial and nonprofit theaters because once a play has been on Broadway the chances are high of it being published and assured of a continued life. Like it or not, Broadway branding helps plays get published, which increases the number of productions and helps increase the odds that it will be included in an anthology somewhere, and accepted into the American canon. Broadway is still the great legitimizer. Broadway is a goal because Broadway equals Success.



## Conclusion

*New plays tell us who we are, right now, and we need to be contemplating that on as broad and expansive a scale as we can. [Producers] should produce the plays they discover that they love – not develop them, not workshop them – PRODUCE them. They should do work they care about and behave as the visionaries they are, leading audiences to art rather than letting themselves get led to showing the same stuff over and over again.*

- Martin Denton

In the theatre world, attitudes towards producers and their roles in bringing new work to the American theatrical canon is changing. By examining past precedents by some of the world's greatest Creative Producers like Cheryl Crawford, Margo Jones and Joseph Papp, we can recognize the trend toward contemporary producers of new work who embrace a dramaturgical sensibility that is honest, inventive and extremely relevant to the lives of people who participate in theatre. Practitioners and audiences both benefit as theatre art continues to reflect, and alter, our views of reality.

The research for this thesis has included the voices of Creative Producers from the past and some of the most innovative contemporary theatre-makers; in the Appendix which follows I have interviewed artistic directors and producers who put the dramaturgical theories into practice.

In conclusion, a new generation of Creative Producers is emerging in the unlikely realm of commercial theatre, nurtured by and modeled after the dramaturgical practice in the nonprofit theatre. After decades of regional, nonprofit theatre dominance in the practice of dramaturgy by Artistic Directors, literary managers and dramaturgs, by universities offering advanced degree programs in dramaturgy, and by a generation of interns working on new play development as readers in nonprofit theaters, producers themselves are also now emerging as the theatre practitioners who embrace the

dramaturgical perspective. These are the Creative Producers of the present who will set the standards of innovation for the theatre in the future.

## Appendix I

### CURRENT PRACTICE: VOICES ON DEVELOPING A NEW PLAY

In order to get to the real pulse of new play development I realized that I needed to hear contemporary voices of Creative Producers and others involved in creating theatre right now. What are their concerns? How does their dramaturgy influence and impact their process as a producer? What are some of the current practices of Creative Producers and theatre-makers today?

To find out, I sent out questions about new play development to many colleagues and working professionals who are producers and artistic directors, requesting their thoughts on the subject. Nine people responded, broadly representing the New York theatre landscape itself: four commercial producers, three nonprofit artistic directors, a dramaturg, and a publisher/critic of new plays. The participants were:

- Martin Denton, Founder, Editor and Chief Reviewer of NYtheatre.com, Executive Director of The New York Theatre Experience which publishes new play anthologies
- Anne Hamilton, Founder, Hamilton Dramaturgy, freelance dramaturg
- Kristin Marting, Co-Founder and Artistic Director, HERE Performing Arts
- Molly Morris, Co-Producer, Pop-Up Theatrics
- Julia Quinn, Independent Producer
- Lauren Rayner, Independent Producer and Director
- Jana Robbins, Broadway Producer, Director and Actress
- Nathaniel Shaw, Artistic Director, The Active Theater, Director and Choreographer

- Suzi Takahashi, Co-Artistic Director, Ex.Pgirl Dance Theater Company, Producer, Director, Actress, Collaborative Theatre-Maker

Their responses were insightful and inspiring, and exhibit the dedication and artistry of those involved in creating new theatrical works in both the commercial and nonprofit sectors. The following transcript is an edited version of the online interviews conducted May, 2013. Responses from all the participants are condensed under the respective questions.

Cate Cammarata (CC): Why Do a New Play?

Martin Denton (MD): I'm going to quote from a blog post I made for the Horse Trade Theater Group about six months ago, because I think I expressed what I have to say about this there:

We need to produce new plays because of their now-ness: they are the products of dynamic artists who occupy the same moment in time as everyone else who's now alive, and the conjunction of technology, history, mores and manners at that moment has informed and shaped their voice regardless of the style or genre or subject of their work. There is much that is timeless in the poetry of Shakespeare, but there is just as much in it that is rooted in his time; that makes his plays historical artifacts that, no matter how beautiful, I am removed from. But I am not removed from the latest work by Kirk Wood Bromley, no matter how much it might superficially "seem" like Shakespeare transplanted to the 21st century: his words, his rhythms, his cadences, his concepts—even if they're expressed in blank verse or iambic pentameter—reflect the world of today, not the world of four centuries ago.

New plays tell us who we are, right now, and we need to be contemplating that on as broad and expansive a scale as we can. Now, I'm not saying not to produce older plays, because they matter too, for other reasons. Mike Nichols' *Death of a Salesman* was undeniably one of the most satisfying theater experiences I've had recently. But in the final analysis, that play pushed me inward and backward. The plays that REALLY matter are the ones that push me outward and forward. John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* did that to me in 1991, and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* did it in 1993. I see work that does it nowadays—Mac Rogers' *Universal Robots* comes to mind, as do Bryn Manion's *Force Trilogy* and John Clancy's *The Event*. But we seldom see this kind of work on Broadway nowadays; certainly not nearly as much as we should.

Others will argue that there are sound economic reasons why yet another revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with some movie stars in the cast makes sense on Broadway but a *Vampire Cowboys* play doesn't. To them I say, yes, I know... and I don't care. Because, whether it makes money or not, we need art. Nehru said, "The art of a people is a true mirror of their minds." And John F. Kennedy said, "Above all, we are coming to understand that the arts incarnate the creativity of a free people. When the creative impulse cannot flourish, when it cannot freely select its methods and objects, when it is deprived of spontaneity, then society severs the root of art."

Anne Hamilton (AH): It is important to produce new plays which are exquisite in meaning and expression. The theatre artist provides a great service to society in that she introduces new viewpoints, modes of expression, and ideas to the public at large. Plays are meant to be performed in public in our American system, as opposed to the private

viewings of the royals and the aristocracy in centuries past. It is our privilege and our responsibility to place new voices, characters and points of view onto the stage, and into the minds of readers of plays, so that we may exercise our rights in a democratic society.

Kristin Marting (KM): At HERE, we are interested in supporting the strength and uniqueness of an artist's vision - helping them find what didn't exist before and hasn't ever been seen. We are excited about creating a space for the unknown to come to life.

Molly Morris (MM): Theatre is evolutionary. I believe it is essential to produce new work in order to create an ongoing forward momentum of creativity on and off the stage. New work is exciting, as currently playwrights are developing so many new ways of storytelling. Genres such as site-specific, promenade, environmental, devised, and physical theatre, for example are becoming more inventive than ever.

Julia Quinn (JQ): There is so much in the world that we haven't explored yet, characters we haven't met, places we haven't visited, truths we haven't told. The audience craves novelty, but will also be suspicious of it, so the material must have the potential for broad appeal...and work on many levels - a nice mix of drama, entertainment, suspense and humor. When you don't find the play you are looking for, the next best thing is to commission someone to write it.

Jana Robbins (JR): I love doing a new play because I love creating. I love bringing a new voice and a new story to life.

Nathaniel Shaw (NS): There is a great enthusiasm for new work, both from artists and the producing community. I think as a small company, finding a new play that excites the theater community is the best way to get on the map.

Suzi Takahashi (ST): When I first started acting I loved the idea of performing in canonical work. But, when I entered into the business of acting in the 90's, it became clear that I (as a woman of size and as a woman of mixed race) was almost never represented in the canonical world. My opportunities were very limited for commercial work. I was working at the Williamstown Theater Festival my first year out of college, struggling to find a place in theater world when two seminal experiences happened. The first was that Claudia Shear [American actress and playwright] was at the theater and somehow I heard her tell

her story of how Jim Nicola [Artistic Director of New York Theatre Workshop] told her that she must make her own work, to give herself a job. I was also deeply impressed by an experimental theater director who trains a group of young students in *Viewpoints* technique. I remember walking by their rehearsal one day after I had been told that I would not be allowed to audition for a role in an Arthur Miller play because the director only wanted to [cast] whites. I realized that type was not art, and immediately began to seek opportunities [to work] in experimental theater and [to study] *Viewpoints*. In this community of artists, it is a rather common thought that actors will make their own work and tell new stories in new ways. I still love to watch the canon, but now as a producer I have no desire to produce anything other than works by voices that are underrepresented in the commercial theater. I consider this to be a moral and ethical obligation. Someone must make new works that show people like me, for in a few generations the population of our country will be mixed and not white; they must see themselves reflected in the theater. Now, as my career title has become director rather than actor, I struggle with the question why [should I] do an old play? Is not my small contribution to the arts to show what has not already been done?

CC: How do you and your organizations go about finding new plays and new playwrights?

MD: We find new plays because producers, publicists and theater artists pitch them to us all the time. The most reliable sources, though, are festivals - especially FringeNYC and a few others (Ice Factory, United Solo, and Planet Connections come to mind as good sources) - and from recommendations. Theater artists are generous and they're smart, as a rule, and they do a great job calling our attention to work they think is worthy. Then, we rely on our amazing volunteer reviewers (like you, Cate) to help us check all the recommendations out.

AH: All of my work has been self-funded. I work as a dramaturg and spend some of my income on producing readings of my plays, traveling to forums where I can read my work, and self-publishing my plays in anthologies. This is what artists have done for centuries to practice and hone their craft.

KM: I go to see new work three times a week in NYC to uncover artists and trends that interest me in contemporary performance. I also travel to festivals nationally and internationally a few times a year. We also do an annual open application process which anyone can apply to.

MM: As a producer my main criteria is to find work that moves me. The rest is gut instinct as to what will work and what won't. Of course the work has to make sense financially as well, but beyond that the content and the way that it makes one feel is the most essential quality. Great theatre leaves an imprint and you know it when you find it. JQ: This is absolutely the most challenging part of launching a project. I rely on networking and referrals, but would love to have other methods of finding great talent.

Lauren Rayner (LR): ...Theater festivals [are] so very important... I have produced in a variety of festivals in here in the city and abroad, and honestly, they are vital to the artists' experience and as an audience member. Festivals allow for a cross-pollination of disciplines as well as a productive way for audiences to amass and see multiple works without constantly wondering where to go next, because it's all right in front of them. Sometimes navigating festival culture can be frustrating (especially when dealing with such beasts as the Edinburgh or New York Fringes), but that is actually what makes Roots & Wings' 6th Annual Duct Tape and A Dream Festival so unique. The board carefully curates each evening, which then runs in repertory over the festivals' five days, so that our audiences receive a wide range of programming and experiences, whilst also staying true to our mission as a company to produce explorative, new works by underserved, emerging artists. I have been proud to be involved with this festival for a long time, and I think our 6th year may be the year where this festival finally outgrows our little black-box space!

JR: I get a lot of submissions, but always prefer seeing to reading. I have never produced a play from just reading it. It has always been a play or musical that I have seen a presentation of, or like many producers today, a show that is already in production that I help to transfer to Broadway.

NS: We have a submission request that goes out to our extended personal and professional networks, and we try to see as many Off- and Off-Off Broadway shows as possible.

ST: In my company, we found a group of interesting, smart, multicultural female actors. We decided to make our own plays out of improvisations. We then "wrote" it on the page, but [only] after the ideas [had been] collectively born in the room.

CC: What attracts you to a new play?

MD: I was actually just asked this question at a forum I did for the graduate students at the Mason Gross MFA program at Rutgers. I was on a panel with John Clancy [American playwright and director] and one of the students asked this very question. I said that I am attracted to work that's new, that takes me somewhere I haven't been before, that's in an unfamiliar or under-represented voice, that looks at the world as it exists today (especially with all the new technological/social stuff that's transforming society), and speaking to or challenging it or asking about it.

But I actually liked John's answer better than mine, so I am swiping it to use here. He said he likes new plays that explore what's happening "here" - and by "here" he meant the stage he and I were standing on, and the audience filled with students in front of us. He said that he likes to understand why live theater continues to be an exchange that happens in this high-tech age, and he's attracted to any play that tries to answer that question in an interesting way. I think he's very smart.

AH: Great structure, singular characters, and the bold, appropriate use of language attract me to new plays.

KM: I always think new work rather than new play, because I am particularly interested in contemporary artists who intuitively merge disciplines to create hybrid work in which one can no longer see the lines between theatre, dance, new media, music or puppetry. I am attracted to the passion of the artist's voice in whatever form s/he chooses to express it.



MM: A new play that captures my imagination is one that has a story that moves me, characters [that] I can relate to, says something that I feel is important and is told in a way that I am compelled by.

JQ: As I specialize in two or three genres, I immediately know if the material is something I can handle as a producer. Consideration of concept and execution naturally follows, but most importantly, I assess my compatibility with the writer.

LR: I typically am attracted to crafting and/or producing live performances that integrate multiple forms of expression, often with multi-media or dance, or maybe even using an ensemble to literally create architecture. As a NYC-based producer I have brought over sixty works to Off-Off-Broadway stages and, time and again, I find myself most artistically intrigued by bringing together teams of artists that are interested in storytelling that often may not be considered straightforward or traditional in nature -- although I do very much enjoy directing Shakespeare (albeit my last bout of that was an all female production of KING LEAR) or bringing back classics from time to time (most recently Sartre's HUIS CLOS "NO EXIT" directed by Roxane Revon on 45th Street, performed in the original French with English supertitles). My fascination with devising works and using a team to create and tell stories did not happen overnight, but perhaps grew out of a feeling I've been having, or a quite possibly a growing and tangible need, that American theater must shift in its focus in order to keep our audiences alive and our storytelling fresh, amongst so many re-mounts and a producers' ever-worrying that our audiences are in rapid decline.

JR: I am most attracted to material that is about transformation. The characters [must] grow or change, or the subject matter [must] inspire us as human beings to grow and change.

NS: [I am attracted to] just a good, solid human story about people doing real things. Something our audience can watch and see a bit of themselves.

ST: I am attracted to new plays that address issues I care about. I am attracted to new plays that are created in nontraditional ways. I am attracted to new plays from other

cultures. I am attracted to new Broadway plays, as well. But in that case, it is to see the latest addition to the canon...

CC: Does the possible audience appeal of a new play come into consideration?

MD: See my answer to the first question. I'm an idealist and naïve, I know; but I think that artistic considerations are the only ones that matter. If I ran a well-funded nonprofit theater, I would feel obligated to only produce plays that were new and that had the potential to show audiences something new or unexpected, to change the conventional experience of theater-going in transformational ways. I think the only time anyone should produce a revival is when some artist or group of core artists has a compelling need to do it. If Derek Jacobi feels like he's ready to play Lear, I say he should; and a commercial producer should produce it. The rest of us should be setting about making and celebrating stuff that's new. I include the critical and academic communities in "the rest of us." How many revivals of 400 year old plays or even forty year old plays did the Globe produce in 1600?

AH: As a playwright, no. I write what I feel is important, and [on] whatever topic which inspires me. As a reader for playwriting competitions, no. I am most concerned with originality, good structure and characterization, and the meaning imparted by the work as a whole. As a dramaturg, no. I am chiefly concerned with assisting the playwright with achieving his or her vision. I will give advice to the playwright about enhancing the work if it is lacking in the form that the playwright has chosen, or if the theme or characters would be better expressed in another form, such as a shorter, or longer work.

KM: No.

MM: I believe that it is important to consider what people will be transformed by, but not to create a work based on commercial viability. My favorite works are brave works.

JQ: Always, first and last.

JR: Absolutely. One must feel that the public will be interested in seeing this play as well. Although as a producer, that is actually my last consideration, as I myself have to love it first.

NS: I think my tastes are not so far out... I expect the plays and stories I'm drawn to will tend to resonate with enough people. I'd say it's a concern, but a backburner one.

ST: I became a producer to make my new work, not to make money or curate a season; so, I sort of assume it is going to be an uphill battle to get people to see it.

CC: So many theater companies have hired dramaturgs and literary managers. Do you currently work with a dramaturg or a literary manager, and if so, what are their responsibilities?

AH: I have worked as a freelance dramaturg and literary manager for twenty-two years, and have built my consultancy, Hamilton Dramaturgy, into an international practice. I dramaturg for individual artists (playwrights, directors, composers, librettists, novelists, memoirists, fiction writers, etc.), and I also act as a private literary manager. After I have dramaturged a certain work for a playwright, I may decide to take on the task of submitting the work to festivals, competitions, fellowship opportunities, and producing organizations. I do this on a case by case basis. I also freelance for producing organizations and professional organizations, doing production dramaturgy, research, teaching workshops, managing staged readings, writing feature articles, and judging script competitions.

KM: Because the aesthetic of the work that is developed and produced in our residency program is so varied, it wouldn't make sense to have one dramaturg work with all of our very different artists. We instead have a dramaturg for the theatre who, together with myself and the lead artists on a project, develops the audience engagement piece of our each production. We do pre- and post-panel conversations and dialogues with a range of experts and academics that deepen our engagement with the issues raised by the work.

JQ: I do not hire dramaturgs, unless the writer asks me to. Even in that situation, I would be extremely selective and raise many questions [about] why and how a dramaturg would be truly helpful in the creative process. I have occasionally agreed to bring in a dramaturg, but have also limited their role to specific areas. I prefer to hire historians, genre experts and psychologists as consultants.

JR: I do work with a part-time literary manager. She is expected to understand my tastes so that she can read or see plays for me to help direct me toward material that she thinks that I will respond to.

NS: We do not. Those fall to our Associate Artistic Director, but final say is with me.

ST: No. For the most recent production that I am working on, we wanted to hire a dramaturg who had published about the subject of our new work. We really wanted to bring this person on board as an early development collaborator. But, during the , I (as the director and associate producer) felt that there was a big gap between the person's ability to talk about research and to be a co-collaborator in the artistic process. So instead we asked this person to be a research consultant, but we could have [had] them artistically co-create the piece. This made us sad. We would have liked to have had this sort of working relationship. I feel like so many aspects of a dramaturg's job get absorbed by the director. As a producer of small non-profit theater, our staffing is always dictated by budget. A dramaturg is usually beyond the budget of a small theater like ours.

CC: How involved are you in the developmental process of a new play?

AH: One of my specialties is new play development. I trained at Columbia University of the Arts and earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre criticism and dramaturgy. Since then I have worked with over 200 playwrights and organizations to develop new work, both here and abroad.

KM: Very. We spend at least two to three years developing each project with the lead artist(s) from inception of the idea to work-in-progress, to workshop, to full production.

MM: I have not been all that involved in development up to this point. I feel that my contributions have been mostly as a nurturer to the work and to the artists.

JQ: Very involved, and very prepared. I do the same research all the authors do, and I have weekly one-on-one meetings with everyone on the team. No detail is too small.

JR: As a producer, I am very involved in the developmental process of a new play, from participating in rewrites, to creating opportunities for the play to be presented in a reading

or in a presentation, as well as attaching the director and the potential team to the material.

NS: Extremely. It's a bit of a juggling act as our staff all work theater jobs outside of Active, but we try to have as much consistent staff presence as possible.

ST: I serve as the director of the new plays that I make. I am also the costume designer and props designer. Occasionally, I write and perform them as well. I am a producer so that I can make my work.

CC: What is your role in rehearsals?

AH: As a production dramaturg, I complete the tasks that the organization or the artist who hired me requires. This ranges from historical and sociological research, to program notes, to sitting in rehearsal and serving as the director's "second set of eyes". I also give feedback to playwrights as they rewrite the script during [the] rehearsal [process].

KM: To be another set of eyes for the artist, giving them feedback about what's reading and what isn't. And my advice is just that - optional advice. It is not an artistic director's note that has to be taken.

JQ: I love being at rehearsals but I am a fly on the wall.

JR: I'm very hands-on producer and do my best to attend as many rehearsals as possible. I then send my comments or notes to the director only.

CC: What is your advice to theaters and producers interested in producing new plays?

MD: They should work hard to release any assumptions about what a good play is; they should embrace diversity and inclusiveness and welcome all voices to their table. They should read John Clancy's essay at <http://www.clydefitchreport.com/2013/05/two-beliefs/>. They should look at the Indie Theater Now website and other resources that can point them to the works of new and current playwrights. They should look abroad as well and let Americans hear voices from other places besides England and Ireland. They should produce the plays they discover that they love - not develop them, not workshop them – PRODUCE them. They should do work they care about and behave as the visionaries

they are, leading audiences to art rather than letting themselves get led to showing the same stuff over and over again.

AH: First, gather a well-trained and artistically-gifted set of dramaturgs and script evaluators to review the plays which are submitted to you. There is no substitute for training, experience, and talent when it comes to this matter. Learn the rules of engagement with playwrights and directors from such organizations as the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, the Dramatists Guild, and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. Know the etiquette and laws regarding new play development. Draw up contracts before beginning work. Hire a dramaturg for artistic support for the playwright, and make sure he or she is experienced in fulfilling the role of advisor and diplomat in the production process. Create high quality program notes for the audience's benefit – they love to learn about the historical and literary background of the play. Watch staged readings in your city in order to find new talent, and new playwrights whose work you like. Hire women artists and make sure that your productions include their work; otherwise you may lose credibility with the public and your audience.

KM: Really listen to the artists - they know best about how to bring their visions to life.

MM: Be brave, do what you love and enjoy every moment of creating great work.

JQ: Embrace the challenge.

JR: You need to take care of your new play like a new child. Give it time to grow, to mature. Give it a production at a place that will help to nurture the project and provide it with the kind of production and attention that it deserves. Make sure to surround it with the best creative team possible, all of whom can contribute to the growth and future success of the play.

NS: Take your time... Developing a play is not to be rushed. Find the time to commit a long development period to a script before selling tickets to a production.

ST: New plays by writers of color should be produced on the main stage and not only in 'second stage' festivals. There are not enough new plays by women being produced. I think theaters must offer new plays. I think they must financially plan ahead, as they may not be as financially successful, but that it is a necessity for the survival and health of our

art form. I think that there must be grants made to theaters to support their efforts to present new work. Edward Albee's latest work is not a 'new play.' 'New plays' are not by established masters. New plays are by those not already in the canon.

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