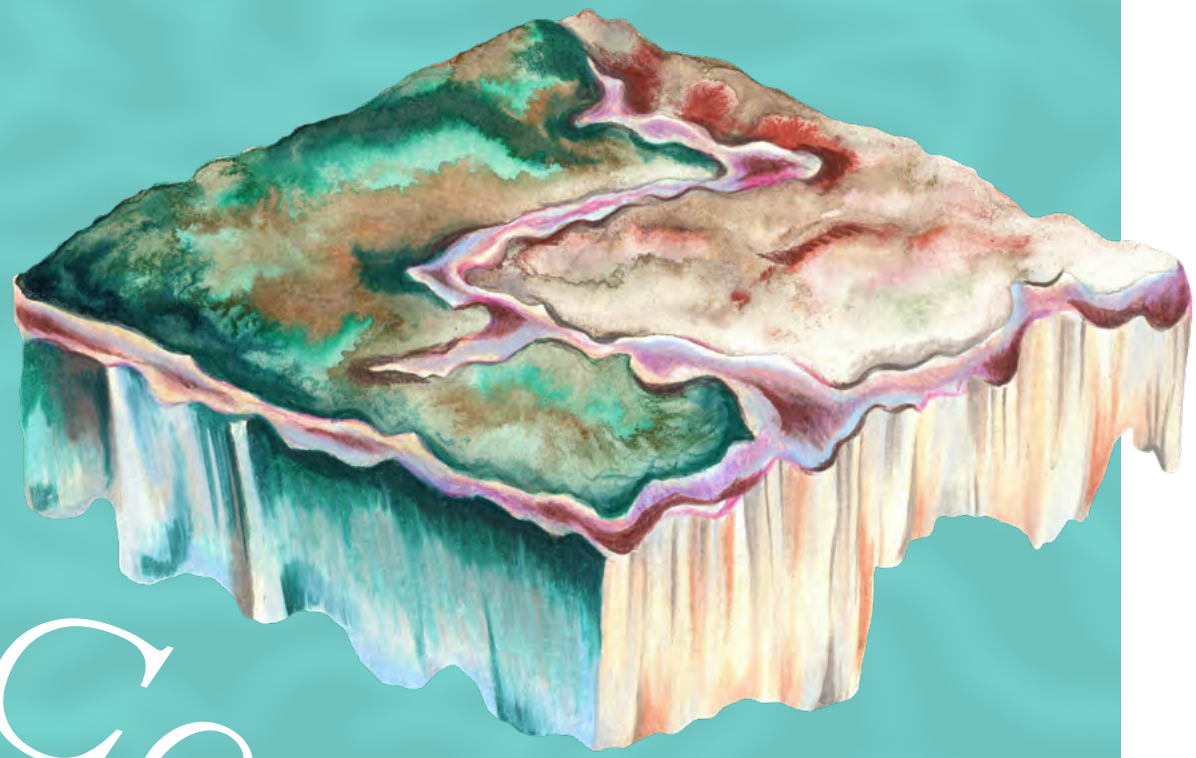
Mona De Weerdt & Valerie Wehrens







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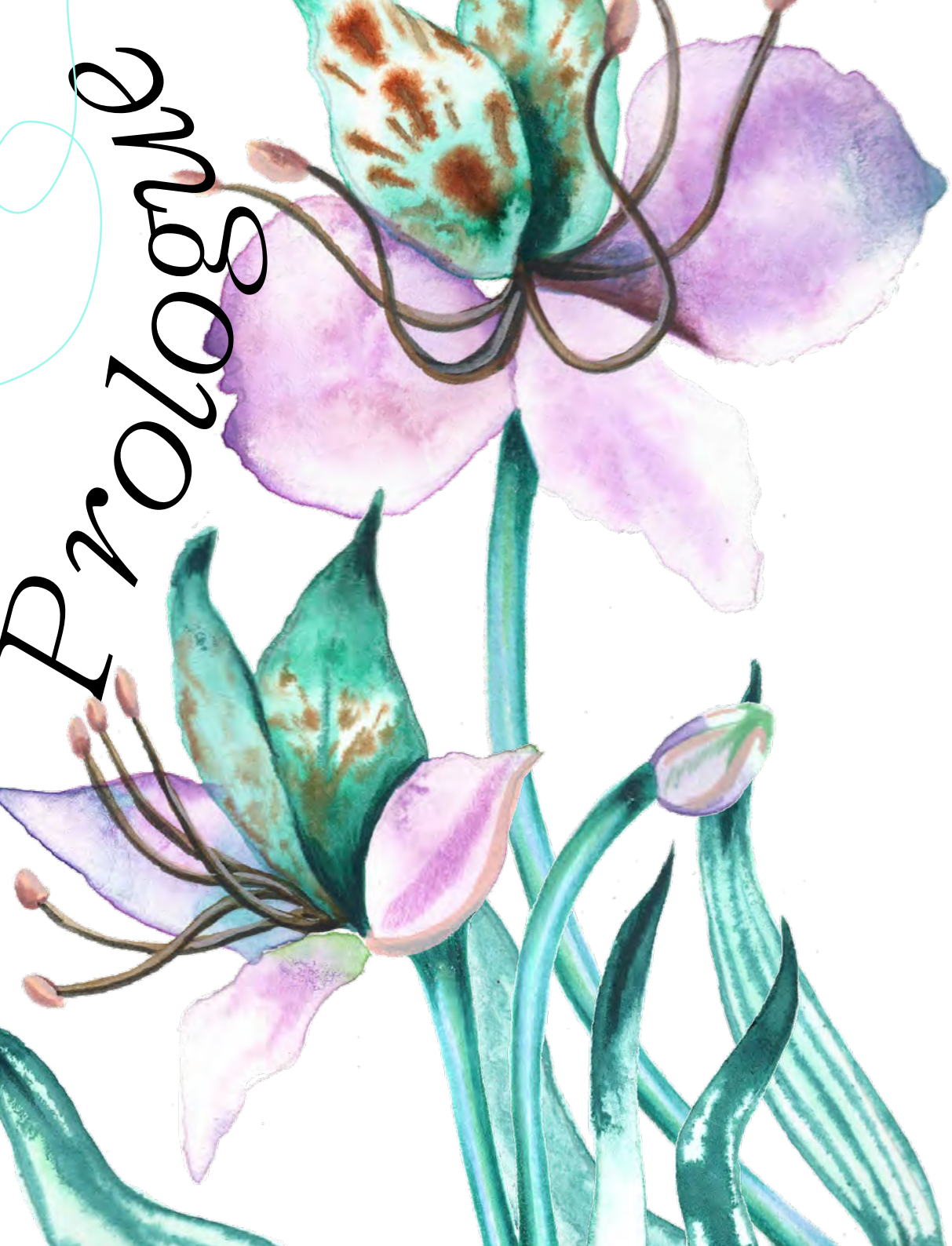
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# Prologue



# Welcome to the world of *Wandering Dramaturgies*!

***Wandering Dramaturgies*** is a playful and lively landscape that brings together experiential knowledge, reflections on the field of dramaturgy as well as concrete dramaturgical tools and methods.

Even though dramaturgical thinking generally unfolds as a process amongst many co-thinkers, dramaturgy—and even more so in dance—tends to be a solitary and often lonely profession. We rarely have the opportunity to exchange ideas and practices with colleagues. As a result, the ways in which dramaturgical knowledge co-shapes artistic processes often remain invisible and are consequently difficult to grasp and convey.

The project ***Wandering Dramaturgies*** arose from both the wish and need for more interchange and engagement with other dramaturgs. Between 2024 and 2026, Mona De Weerdt conducted interviews with 14 different (dance) dramaturgs from Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. These conversations were recorded and transcribed. Mona and Valerie Wehrens then combed through the observations generated within these conversations, as well as the tools and methods that were shared. Into which conceptual frameworks can we group the experiences and snippets of knowledge shared with us? Through collaboration with illustrator Rommy González, *Wandering Dramaturgies* thus emerged—a small biotope of dramaturgy, an entire world of its own, which we are thrilled to be able to share in this publication, as well as an interactive website: (**wandering-dramaturgies.ch**).

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to everyone who created connections with us—all participants and contributors, whether they were interview partners, mentors or important companions—all those who shared their observations and tools with us and made this knowledge visible and applicable. Thank you for contributing to a living network within dramaturgy.

Let's grow roots together.
Valerie & Mona

# Introduction

For us, Mona and Valerie, who were arriving at the idea of wandering dramaturgies within this project by crossing through different concepts of landscape, dramaturgical work consists of a collaborative and shared activity within choreographic processes. Working dramaturgically means setting off together with all other project participants on a journey of creating, shifting, or seeking meaning, travelling great distances together, sometimes choosing different paths, as well as taking detours or getting sidetracked. It involves making decisions or carrying concepts, ideas, or movement-materials over long stretches of time. As such, dramaturgical thinking also asks us to commit to openness, to venture into the unknown, get lost and wander astray at times, and to courageously take new paths time and again.

Artistic work allows for concepts to be sought out from other fields of knowledge, which can then be transferred and translated into our own practice. If we follow this invitation in order to construct an understanding of dramaturgy as a multifaceted landscape, geomorphology offers a point of departure for a working definition of our dramaturgical approach. Geomorphology is the science of the Earth's topography—the underlying processes of its formation as well as its transformation—and looks at the existing relationships between adjacent elements. If we approach landscape by understanding it as a multitude of interweaving, interconnected contiguities between innumerable neighbors, then the question is not: What living objects are present here? It becomes rather: What do these bodies do with one another? And it is not necessarily: What can I do in this landscape? But rather: How is this landscape already doing itself, and how is it constituting itself with me being present in it?

Perhaps such an understanding of landscape—grafted onto the field of dramaturgy—can lead to a playful, phenomenological, and analytical working approach: This might mean not to enter into a work purely cognitively, with pressure to start creating something directly, to find language for our observations, or to "know". A framework—borrowed from geomorphology—might enable those of us who work within the performing arts to start from perceiving, sensing and describing.

"You never hear the wind itself," Valerie learned a few years ago from artist and sound designer Timm Roller. What's more, it's the interaction between the wind and the surface with which it plays that can be heard. In his recordings of the Atacama Desert, it's not the wind we hear, but rather, the wind sweeping through spines of a cactus, setting them in motion ever so slightly. Or the wind squeezing through the windshield of Timm's microphone, softly deflecting and reshaping the airflow. It is these ongoing interactions that turn landscape into an activity. Into neighborly relationships and contiguities that manifest as connections every single second.

How do these neighbors support, decompose, layer, deform, intertwine, hollow out, disrupt, hold, nourish, fulfill, describe, and enable one another? How do they define, follow, or draw sustenance from one another; how do they interweave, brush up against one another, or form a mutual foundation? The classic object of wonder for all city children: how a small plant manages to burst through a crack in the pavement and fight for a habitat held in place by the surrounding concrete.

In this respect, dramaturgy may find itself to be a process of uncovering landscape-y relationships: observing a multitude of mutual co-constructions (within a process, a dance piece, or a collaboration) piece by piece. Taking seriously the accumulation of those interrelationships and attempting to describe them so precisely—contact surface by contact surface—that some fragments of the bigger picture can be gleaned from them. Thus is the constant search of dramaturgy.

With this, we invite you to dive into the landscape of ***Wandering Dramaturgies***. Take your time, look around, have a stroll, and be curious. There is much to discover.

(Parts of this introduction are based on the text *Geomorphology,* published in Valerie Wehrens: *WORDSCAPES,* 2019.)





CACTUS



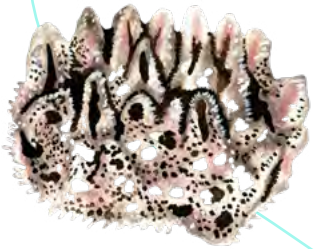
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TOOLBOX



SPONGE



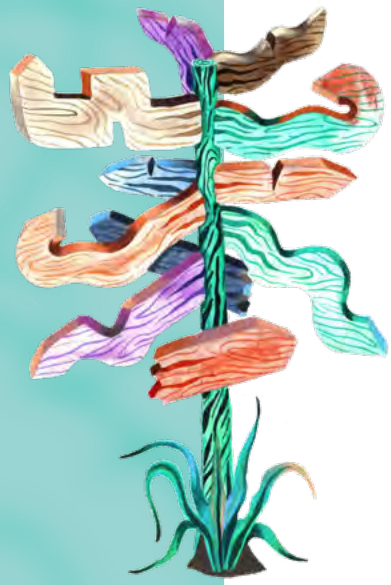
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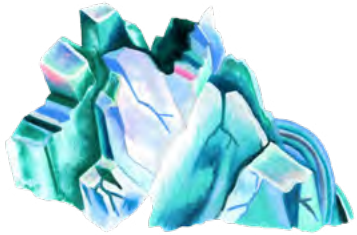
HIKING SHOE



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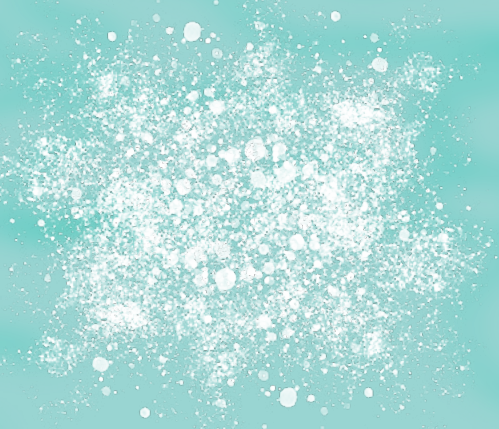
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BLOCK OF ICE



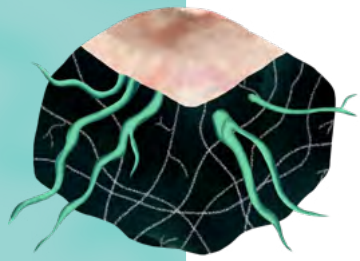
OCTOPUS



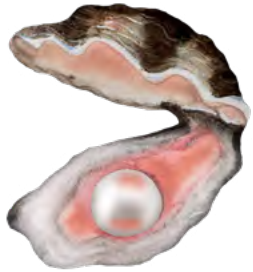
FOG



CAMPFIRE



ROOT NETWORK

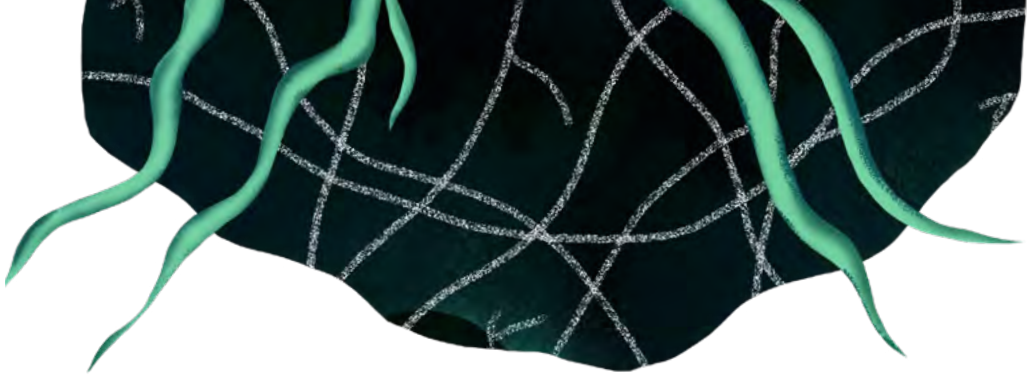


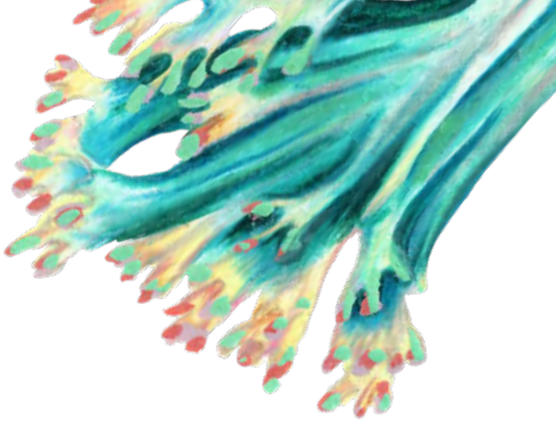
SEA SHELL



CRYSTAL

# Root Network





**Dramaturgical modes of thinking create points of connection; they weave and intertwine in a compositional, artistic, and material way. During a project, ideas, materials, sensorial experiences, and concepts often grow and proliferate in all possible directions—like a rhizome—and must continually find their way back to one another. As such, one dramaturgical function is to create junctions and relationships within a creative process: from conceptual ideas to their artistic realization, both within the team as well as between the piece and the audience. What connections and relational links do we seek to establish?**

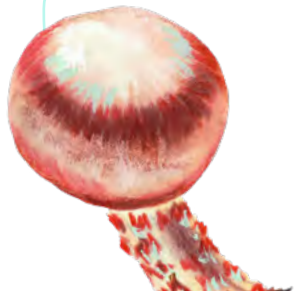


ARU RAY TORMANN

I understand dramaturgy as a juncture between artistic work and the conditions under which it takes place. As such, dramaturgy is invariably a political and social practice, a vessel of encounter and interchange, an undertaking that binds ideas together and knits a network between the artists involved in the project and the context in which this process is taking place. In this way, dramaturgy is not a position situated between other positions but rather brings everything together.

MONA DE WEERDT

Dramaturgy is a social and relational practice. It brings things—bodies, sounds, materials, and objects—into correlation with one another. Dramaturgy engages with spatial dispositives and power dynamics; the design of spaces; the relationship between performers as well as that between performers and the audience; ways and qualities of seeing; watching and being watched and different forms of address. Dramaturgical lines of questioning therefore engage with aspects such as: What kind of space are we forming and opening up—sensorially, aesthetically, and atmospherically? What kind of setting, what kind of seating arrangement does the examination of a certain topic require? How can we invite audiences into this space? And what are we inviting them to?



MONICA GILLETTE

Dramaturgy is relation-building, which means being in dialogue with the artist, the process and the artistic work.

JOHANNA HILARI

I always see dramaturgy as an accompanying, interwoven practice that, on the one hand, knits together internal logics, surprises, and crises, and, on the other hand, incorporates external contexts. Dramaturgical practice also involves reflection, whether about the piece or the rehearsals, or facilitating and initiating collective processes of reflection.

LISA LEOPOLD

For me, (dance) dramaturgy primarily involves the process of contextualization; it attempts to render correlations visible and accessible, while also allowing interstices to remain delicate and vague.

ANNE-LAURE SAHY

In my view, it's important for the dramaturg to be anchored, or rooted. I need to find a sense of inner calm to do this work properly and to be able to practice active listening. I listen and take things in, but I don't hesitate to give my opinion and offer references that aren't particularly scholarly; e.g., something along the lines of: That reminds me of this story. Or if I want to highlight something that reflects a current aesthetic trend: That reminds me of X's show. We as dramaturges are responsible for the movement of inside-outside, micro-macro, and concrete-meta. Dramaturgy links the stage with society, the social role of the art that we are creating, as well as with something far beyond that.

MARIE ALEXIS

Dramaturgical work involves making connections—in other words, building bridges: between objects, materials, and ideas, but also between an artistic work and its audience.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

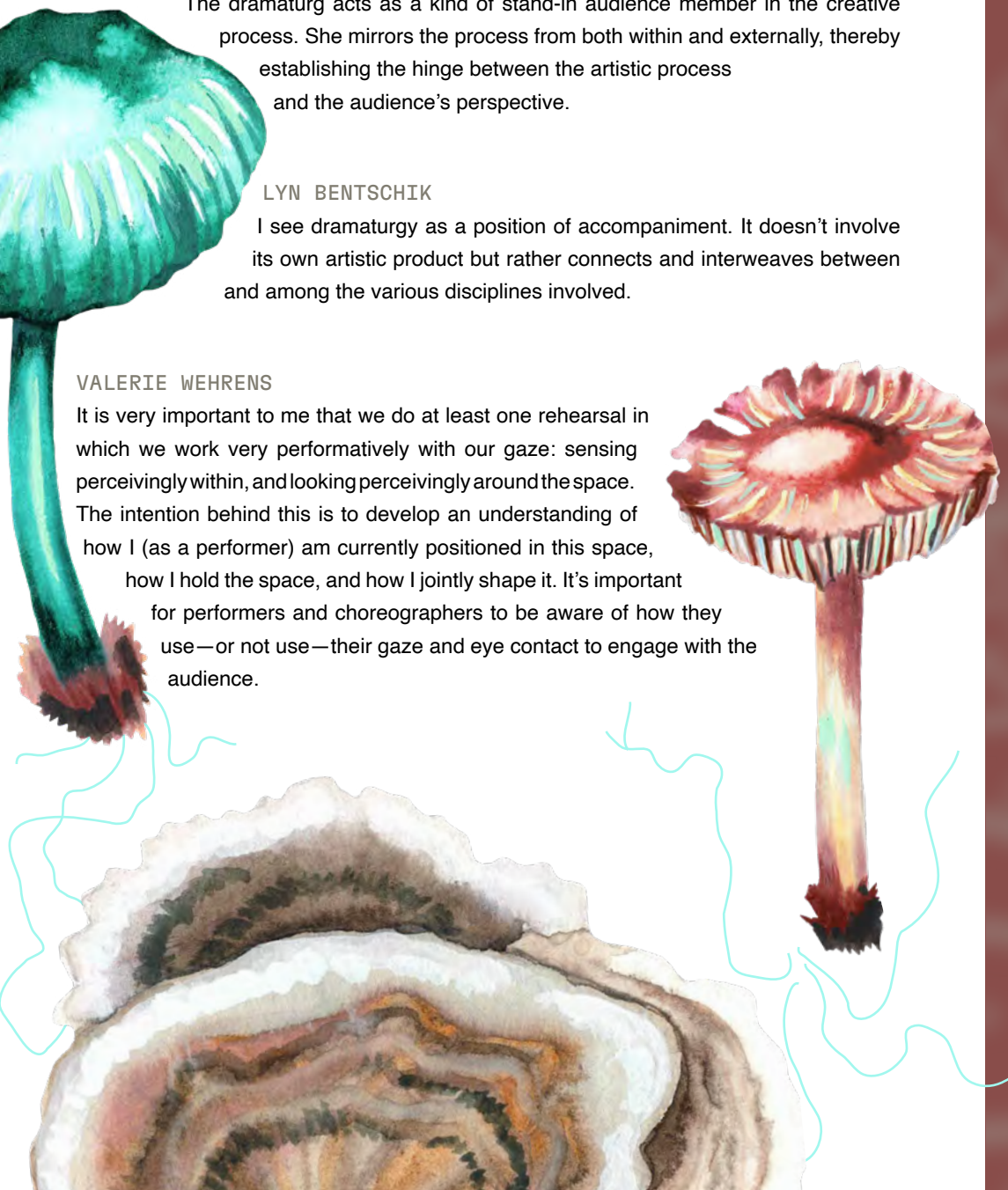
The dramaturg acts as a kind of stand-in audience member in the creative process. She mirrors the process from both within and externally, thereby establishing the hinge between the artistic process and the audience's perspective.

LYN BENTSCHIK

I see dramaturgy as a position of accompaniment. It doesn't involve its own artistic product but rather connects and interweaves between and among the various disciplines involved.

VALERIE WEHRENS

It is very important to me that we do at least one rehearsal in which we work very performatively with our gaze: sensing perceivingly within, and looking perceivingly around the space. The intention behind this is to develop an understanding of how I (as a performer) am currently positioned in this space, how I hold the space, and how I jointly shape it. It's important for performers and choreographers to be aware of how they use—or not use—their gaze and eye contact to engage with the audience.





# Hiking Shoe

**Let's go! A project's beginning is often a moment of particular importance. How do we start our journey? Where do we want to end up together? And how do we get there? At the starting point of an artistic process, it is important from a dramaturgical standpoint to sketch out the path that is to be taken together. It's essential to discuss the mode of collaboration, clarify roles, and identify mutual expectations and wishes. What are our wants and needs, both individually and as a team? But also, what do we want to avoid? Which shoes do we not want to put on?**

## Before a collaboration starts

MONICA GILLETTE

Dramaturgical work to me means bringing the artists into movement, not only physically but also mentally, and through this, supporting the movement of the work!

MONICA GILLETTE

Some questions for a first encounter to figure out whether artist and dramaturg are a good match and to understand some mutual expectations, could be:

- Why do you want me to be your dramaturg?
- What about me or my past work interests you?
- What are your wishes, needs, expectations of me?
- How would you like to work together?

SELINA BEGHETTO

Before I take on a project, I always consider the following four factors:

- Does the topic interest me?
- Do I like the people—do they seem nice?
- Is there money?
- Will I learn something new?

If three of these aspects are in place—and depending on what I need at the time—I'll take the project on.

## When a project starts

ARU RAY TORMANN

At the start of a collaboration, my priority is to clarify expectations and wishes, and to communicate which of these I can fulfill. It is important to me to understand, what do the artists want and expect from a dramaturg? What is their understanding of dramaturgy, and what do they expect from it? And I then share my own view of dramaturgy and what I can offer—to see where our expectations overlap and where they do not.

SELINA BEGHETTO

At the beginning of a process it's important to clarify expectations, roles, and working principles, and to develop a plan of what will happen when in order to map out a joint path and establish milestones.

JESSICA HUBER

Before the beginning of the project, I try to clarify very project-specific matters with the choreographers: How does the person want to work? What are they afraid of? Where and how can I support them? Questions, expectations, and wishes are then discussed with the team: What does the artist need and expect from their team? What do the performers and project participants need to be able to work well, or even just to begin their day? Will there be individual or group warm-ups? Will we have daily check-ins? How long are the working days? What choreographic methods will be used, and what will be expected of the performers? Will they mainly have to learn material, or will they be co-creators who generate material? Clarifying and communicating such matters in advance can often nip the potential for disagreements in the bud.

CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

At the start of a collaboration I always quickly explain what I do, how I work dramaturgically, how I watch and give feedback, because watching someone else trying something out with an external gaze is always linked to power dynamics and (passing) judgment.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

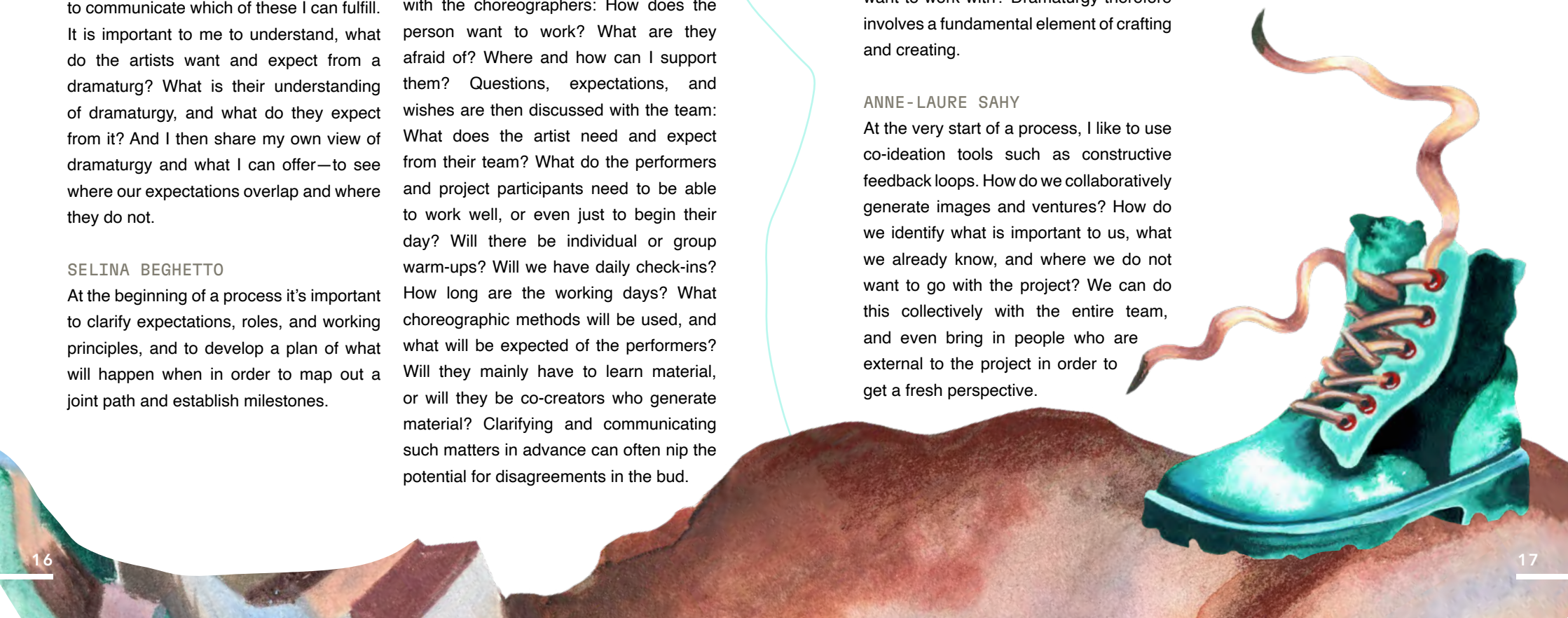
Dramaturgical work involves conceptual thinking: What is the framework, and what are the points of reference? What is the central question? What methods do we want to work with? Dramaturgy therefore involves a fundamental element of crafting and creating.

ANNE-LAURE SAHY

At the very start of a process, I like to use co-ideation tools such as constructive feedback loops. How do we collaboratively generate images and ventures? How do we identify what is important to us, what we already know, and where we do not want to go with the project? We can do this collectively with the entire team, and even bring in people who are external to the project in order to get a fresh perspective.

MONICA GILLETTE

Dance dramaturgy to me is a relationship that is continuously unfolding: with the maker, the material, the work, and the process. So for me it has a lot to do with timing. Not only the timing of the work, the creation, the process, but also the timing of my visits, which means not being there too much, nor too little—to balance this is like a dance in itself. Because for me, having distance and not being in the studio all the time is really important for my own processing of the work.



# Ocean

**The beginning of an artistic process is marked by openness. A first step in dramaturgical work involves delving together into topics, research, and questions. As a result, new worlds can open up; elements, associations, and motifs may emerge that either didn't yet exist or were not yet apparent at the outset. However, abysses can also emerge. Recognizing the depth of not knowing and the infinitude of directions and possibilities often makes for an exhilarating start, but it can also be unsettling. How do we set forth together into this vast ocean?**

ARU RAY TORMANN

I have a stance that I take toward dramaturgy, or rather, when I enter into a dramaturgical process. It is a stance of openness, honesty, and the readiness to accept not knowing in advance what a particular process will require. This means I cannot simply enter a process with a predefined roadmap. Rather, it is a question of adapting working methods to the process and perhaps inventing new methods together.

ADINA SECRETAN

I do something that I call "the wandering document." This is a document with pictures and texts that I do like one or two weeks into a process when I get the topic, the ideas, the references that the choreographer is looking for a bit more. I then do a "wander through the internet" and create a document with what I find. That document is offered to the team and the choreographer; things can be added and it can become a growing archive. This paper is fragmentary, illogical. The method is linked with intuitive thinking and intuitive references. If I can, I mix high-class references from so-called high culture and very cheesy or even lame stuff on purpose, so that this research thinks outside of the box, aesthetically, and allows things to go somewhere you wouldn't think of.

MONA DE WEERDT

I often work with a Miro board, which is a digital collaboration and visualisation tool. Miro is a platform for gathering ideas and serves to collectively assemble concepts, references, keywords, questions, and quotes, as well as images for set or costume designs, which are then accessible to all the project participants. Things can also be added to and documented on an ongoing basis. You can use a Miro board to create clear categories—such as research, set design, scene sequences, etc.—but you can also record seemingly minor details, thoughts, associations, and references, as well. This often random collection helps us to suddenly recall long-forgotten details later in the process and perhaps to discard these aspects entirely or to revisit them.



# Octopus

**(Dance) dramaturgy is not purely rational or semantic; it is rather a corporeal-sensorial practice. As such, speaking shares importance with sensing, feeling, observing, and experiencing. These phenomenological and corporal aspects of dramaturgical work require that enough attention can be devoted during the process to sensory experiences, to the emotions and feelings that are evoked. When the whole body becomes a sensory surface and thought can arise from anywhere, what aspects of a piece come to the fore?**



LISA LEOPOLD

In dramaturgical practice it is vital to think from the body, to take seriously and heed the body's perception. As such, it is crucial to continually remind ourselves that our own bodies possess knowledge and contribute to the dramaturgical process. (Dance) dramaturgy thus seeks to incorporate feeling, seeing, hearing, and smelling on an equal footing—it is in and of itself a body: performative, expressive, resonant.

ADINA SECRETAN

One main skill in dramaturgical work is listening carefully and attentively. Not only with our ears but also with a listening body. This means, for example, being aware of what your body position is, how you are sitting, how your arms and legs are positioned, what your hands are doing while listening, and how this is influencing your listening.



ARU RAY TORMANN

A dramaturg listens—not just aurally, but with the entire body. By this I mean being present and receptive, and constantly allowing yourself to be moved by the things that are happening around you—and recognizing where the limits of presence, receptivity, and vulnerability appear, and why.

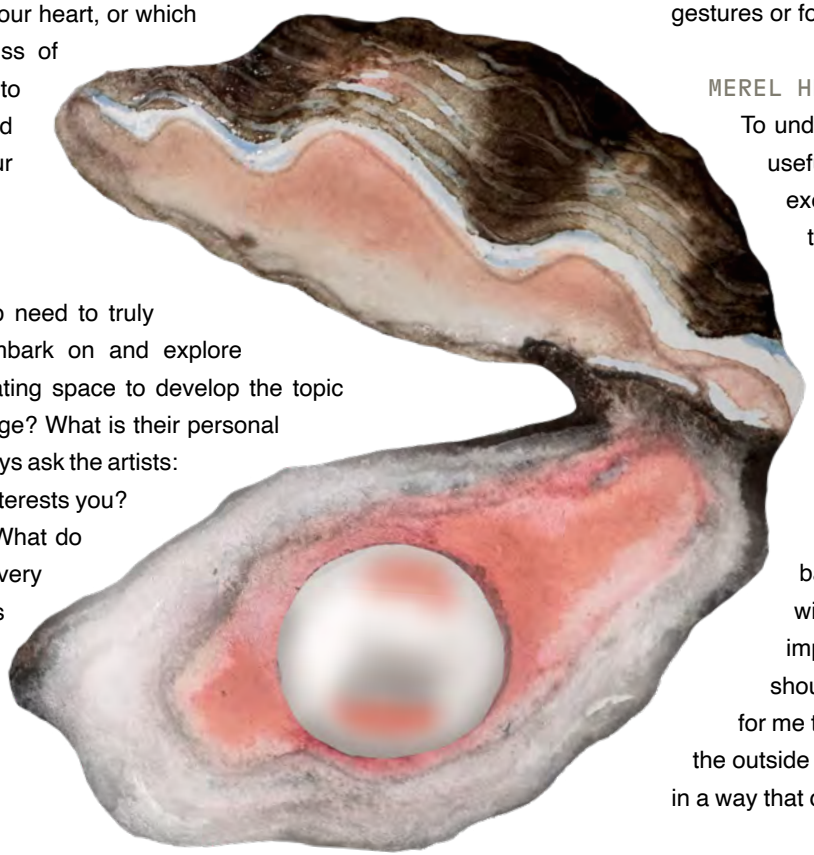
# Sea Shell

**Our stances on whether art must or may be political—or whether it's even possible for art to be apolitical—play a major role in how we shape artistic processes and works. Values are more than mere abstract convictions. They create the actual conditions for artistic (collaborative) work and vary according to the context, approach, theme, and (political) aims of our art. In the harsh world of cultural production with the stipulations set out by funding bodies and institutions, how can we safeguard our inner treasures—our convictions and stances—alongside our passion for creativity, and allow them to flow into our processes and projects?**



CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

One central question for my dramaturgical work, which I also pose to the artists: What is it that lies close to your heart, or which issues would you like to raise awareness of through your work? What would you like to change or impact societally, politically— and on a small or large scale? What are your values, what is your political worldview?



JESSICA HUBER

In order to do my job well, I feel a deep need to truly understand why an artist wishes to embark on and explore a particular topic. Is it a question of creating space to develop the topic further? Or communicating a clear message? What is their personal connection to the topic? Accordingly, I always ask the artists: What is the topic? What is it about it that interests you? Why do you want to work on this topic? What do you want to communicate (through it)? It is very important for me to understand the artist's personal urgency in order to be able to support a piece effectively. And accordingly, I resolutely pose these questions again and again throughout the process.

SELINA BEGHETTO

Our values have to align in the sense of: What is it that matters to the people I work with? What are their values, their work attitudes, their intrinsic motivations?

LISA LEOPOLD

What does it mean to not just take—ideas, resources, energy—but to feed something back into the cycle as well? I find it fascinating how the principle of give and take, in the sense of a harmonious relationship and balance, can manifest itself in an artistic process. How can we give something back to the artistic material, the inspiration, or the people with whom we work, or with whom we share our work? Are there gestures or forms of giving that can be rooted within the process?

MEREL HEERING

To understand what is most important to people in doing their jobs is very useful groundwork for guiding a collaborative process. There's a value exercise that helps a team to understand what their core values are. I took this exercise from Brené Brown's leadership book *Dare to Lead*. In this book, there is a list with a lot of examples of values. Everyone first picks ten values from this list that are important to them. Then, the next step is to bring them down to two values that are most important. That forms the base for a conversation on the core values in a group.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

I have worked extensively with people who have a similar class background as mine. And also with disabled artists and artists with chronic illnesses—artists who, unlike me, work from a position impacted by discrimination or marginalization. This is a reality that we should negotiate and reflect on together. In these contexts, it's important for me to consider: How can I as a dramaturg represent these artists' work to the outside world? How can I discuss it with institutions, journalists, and curators in a way that doesn't amount to tokenization or reduce the artists to their disability?

LYN BENTSCHIK

Within the work process, I am very sensitive to exploitative, abusive, or hierarchical structures. As a dramaturg I must address these issues and protect the dancers, team members, and the audience if, for example, bodies, time, emotions, or boundaries are treated with disrespect.

# Cactus

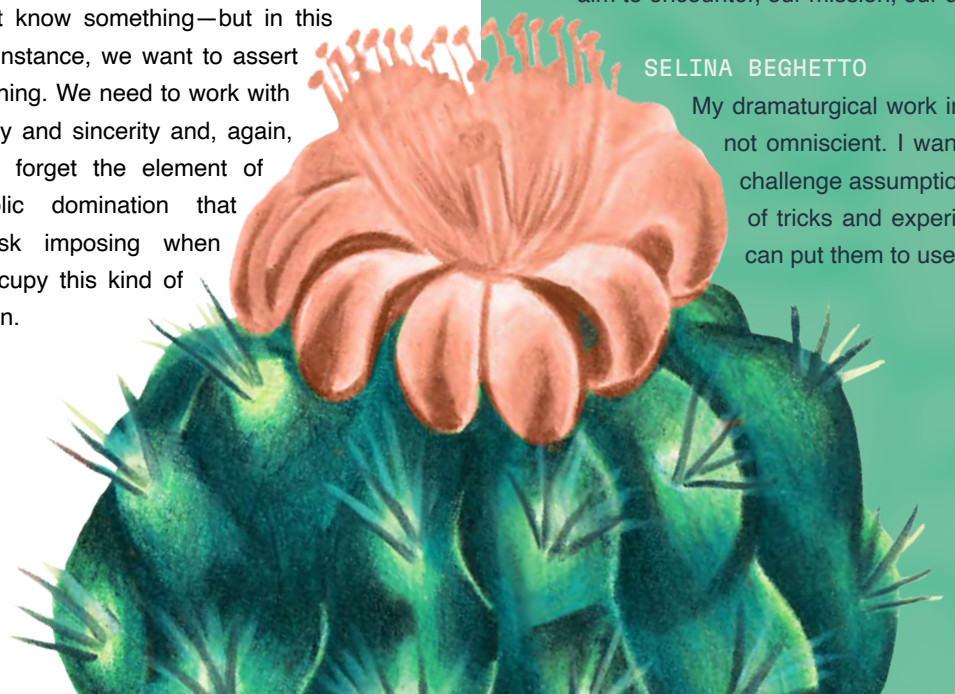
**We are all molded by our cultural, social, and family backgrounds, by our (assigned) gender and identity, by our education and our past encounters, as well as by our work and life experiences. What have we lived, learned, and stored? This reservoir shapes our emotions, our bodies, and our perspectives. They inform the positions we take, our positionality, and the dramaturgical approaches in our work. When are we soft and permeable, and when are we prickly and defensive? How flexible we remain as dramaturgs also determines how many things we can learn to take in that were previously unknown to us.**

MEREL HEERING

Positionality means to have an awareness of the way my race, education, class, gender, and all the other intersections that I embody inform the way I talk, perceive, am present but also the things I am sensitive to, the way I validate things; my taste, my preferences, my dislikes. To me personally, I feel it is my responsibility to communicate my awareness around my positionality and the way I perceive things in the way I give feedback and guide a process. In this way I can be held accountable and it's easier for the artist to position themselves and see if they do or do not want to take into account what I'm bringing up. This has to do with how to build trust in a relationship, with transparency and awareness of power relations, and the importance of being specific about your contribution in order to not impose one's views on someone else.

ANNE-LAURE SAHY

For me, it is crucial to be mindful of our own positionality, our unique perspective, and the symbolic power that we might exert over others. It is also important to be able to admit that in this situation, we do not know something—but in this other instance, we want to assert something. We need to work with humility and sincerity and, again, to not forget the element of symbolic domination that we risk imposing when we occupy this kind of position.



ALEXANDRA HENNIG

The dramaturg is a person who has the artist's trust. She attends rehearsals, shares her impressions, asks questions, and provides feedback. These impressions are shaped by specific knowledge—a body of knowledge that encompasses dance history, dance culture, and popular culture—but are also influenced by non-academic questions and perspectives, by social background, cultural influences, as well as family background.

MEREL HEERING

There are questions you can ask an artist—but also yourself as a dramaturg to reflect on your own practice: Who has influenced you? What were the encounters that led you to this moment, this view, this work, this approach? These questions make us realize that an idea, a style, a way of working is not just our own, but it grows along the way and there were people who came before us. We are influenced by the people we meet and are accompanied by. Those people and influences keep "moving through us." It leads us away from the idea of the artist as a lonely genius and into creation as a relational practice. And it also is a way to analyze and get more insight about who you surround yourself with. Who of the people around you share and affirm your world view, who challenges it? It allows us to see how diverse or similar the people we are in dialogue with are and what that tells us about our practices, our productions, the audiences we aim to encounter, our mission, our desired impact, our place in society, etc.

SELINA BEGHETTO

My dramaturgical work involves making suggestions and is open in nature, not omniscient. I want to be able to talk about anything, ask questions, challenge assumptions, and share my observations. I come with my bag of tricks and experiences, and I'm happy to share them. Together we can put them to use.

# Notebook



**There is no single, valid definition of (dance) dramaturgy; rather, there exist many different ideas of what dramaturgy is and can provide, and what dramaturgical work involves. We all bring with us both different understandings of dramaturgy and our own self-perceptions as dramaturgs, which we have noted down over the years and continue to develop. Every project shapes us and marks out a new chapter. What do we understand by dramaturgy? How do we describe our dramaturgical practices as well as our working approaches and methods?**

ANNE-LAURE SAHY

Dramaturgy is situated "between" things. It flows and is invisible; it is temperature, balance, and energy, something that you can really feel when things are flowing. Like a wind or a breath—both within the body, between bodies and people, but also between the team onstage and the institution where the work takes place, as well as the audience's bodies and the non-human.

CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

I see dramaturgy as a position or role that immerses itself, identifies imprecisions or ambiguities, and mirrors what is happening within the process and what certain things can evoke.

JESSICA HUBER

In my artistic and dramaturgical work, I work with the concept of "wet and dry knowledge"—an expression that Jay Griffiths uses in her book *Wild—An Elemental Journey*. While "dry knowledge" refers to theoretical and discursive knowledge that can be found in books, "wet knowledge" means lived experiences, physical knowledge, intuition. The best dramaturgical practice to me is, when the two of them meet and become "humid knowledge".

JOHANNA HILARI & SELINA BEGHETTO

Dramaturgy refers both to structure and to the collective practice of structuring. In other words, on the one hand, dramaturgy is process-oriented, in that it emerges from the creative process and at the same time shapes it. On the other hand, it is permanent, in that it relates to the logic and structure of the "finished" artistic work.

LISA LEOPOLD

(Dance) dramaturgy opens up spaces, listens to voices, and bridges worlds. It allows the concrete and the abstract to fluctuate, brings the hidden up to the surface, and encounters the unknown with curiosity and courage.

MARIE ALEXIS

I see building bridges between theme and form as the central task of dramaturgy.

ARU RAY TORMANN

I like to imagine artistic processes as a landscape in which a certain question is embedded. I therefore view dramaturgy as a cartographical process. I don't mean the act of surveying, but rather creating an understanding and observation of the political and social landscape that surrounds this question as well as the artistic methods with which we face our question.

VALERIE WEHRENS

For me, dramaturgy is best understood as a collective endeavor, rather than as an individual and their role within a project. It is a dialogic, group-based, multivocal process of shared meaning-making.

LYN BENTSCHIK

Dramaturgy requires clear opinions and a modest ego, as the dramaturgical role is to support and advise but it rarely encompasses the authority to make final decisions.

MONICA GILLETTE

I can't say dramaturgy is this one thing, as working dramaturgically is different with each artist. It can be centered on ingredients like rhythm, timing, pacing, body, choreographic movement, and lighting. Or way more focused on how we do things. This means the dramaturgical work is maybe less dependent on the theme or topic, but on how the artists create and build up their material.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

I continually ask myself: what are the components of good dramaturgy, or even a good dramaturgical job? I believe that a piece is successful when its concept, narrative arcs, and the way the idea is conveyed come through. A piece has to possess its own inner logic.

MONA DE WEERDT

Dramaturgy involves questions about how conceptual and artistic ideas can be translated into performative events in time and space.

# Campfire

**One of the main tasks that are expected of dramaturgy is to provide opportunities for reflection and feedback within artistic processes by coming together (often in a circle) to exchange thoughts, observations and ideas. Different junctures in the process require different forms of this practice: at times there needs to be an encouraging and supportive approach, while at others a more critical eye is useful; sometimes a group setting is appropriate, and at other times a one-on-one meeting between the dramaturg and the choreographer is more called for. Once in a while, heated moments of friction are also called for in order to question things in a productive way. How can we set things on fire, transform them, or let them go?**

MARIE ALEXIS

For me, there needs to be a clear agreement on how feedback should work, how it should be given, and whom it's directed to. For example, as a dramaturg, I never try to give feedback directly to the dancers, because it can be confusing for them to receive different input from both the dramaturg and the choreographer. Or the choreographer might feel railroaded by it.

MONICA GILLETTE

With my feedback, I don't want the person to feel stuck, but rather excited. So the best and most productive feedback you can give is one that motivates the artist and wants them to go back to the studio and keep working!



LYN BENTSCHIK

In the lead-up to a run, I often ask: What kind of feedback is the choreographer looking for? This helps me to focus on specific aspects when I watch the piece. When giving feedback, I use a sort of "sandwich technique" at times. In other words, I don't just list all the positives or all the negatives at once, but alternate between critical and constructive-encouraging comments.

MEREL HEERING

Sometimes it is helpful for the artist to identify what kind of feedback they are actually looking for in that particular moment, to understand their needs and their capacity a bit better. Therefore, before giving feedback, I sometimes ask questions about this, such as:

- Are you looking for advice or affirmation?
- Do you wish to get concrete strategies?
- Do you want to hear my personal experiences?
- Would it be helpful if I share sources that can help you find certain answers for yourself?

JOHANNA HILARI

The positives always come first. As a foray, I describe: What went well? What fascinated, inspired, and moved me? Generally, when giving feedback, I often refer to previous rehearsals or run-throughs and formulate my observations in relation to them: What has changed, further developed, etc.?

ADINA SECRETAN

When giving feedback, I stick to speaking in the I-form to show that the perspective is subjective, not only grammatically but also philosophically and to avoid being seen as the person full of knowledge or power.

MONA DE WEERDT

When I give feedback, I often distinguish between describing the action onstage and the aesthetic effect. In other words, what is happening on stage and how does it affect me physically or emotionally? How do things resonate kinesthetically, and what is their effect on my nervous system?

CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

My first question following a presentation of material or a so-called run-through is always directed at the performers in order to give more space and weight to the experience from within before I share external impressions. So the first thing I ask is: How was it for you? When it comes to finding a dramaturgical structure, a narrative structure, an overarching framework, and an overall feeling for the piece together, I try to take into account from a dramaturgical perspective the plurality of the people who will experience the piece. That is why I find sharing sessions very important for gathering different feedback over the course of the process.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

Different moments in the process require different types of feedback. During improvisations or moments of generating material, for example, I often use mirroring or descriptive feedback, where I mirror what I saw, sensed, thought, and felt: What references came to mind as I watched, but also what emotions I experienced. For instance, what was very loud, glaring, exciting, or boring? But then I also give very concrete feedback in the sense of: What worked for me and why? Which moments did I find particularly good or touching, and why? What did they move within me? I also find it important to hear from the various voices of the other team members regarding moments, scenes, and movement material during the process in order to establish an intersubjective grasp of the piece. Then, toward the end of the process, I often provide only very practical, pragmatic guidance.

ANNE-LAURE SAHY

I like to make sure that the other person has really understood my feedback and what I was getting at. I ask them to repeat it or put it into their own words, both to check that they've got it right and also to see if I believe it myself.



# Fog

**During an artistic process, our vision can become clouded by fears, doubts, or worries that arise. Where have we wound up? What comes next? However, moments of wandering, of not knowing, or of losing our way can also be important and productive if they lead us to discover how we can be there for one another, or how to be lost together. From time to time, roving into the mist together can make for an important dramaturgical stimulus. When we've gone astray, how do we find our way back to a path that feels right for us?**

MEREL HEERING

When people articulate a question, I generally don't immediately give an answer but rather start questioning the question to figure out: Is that really the question you are asking? With this strategy, I try to help people to realize what is rooted in personal fear and what is rooted in the actual artistic work. Often you can find an overlap of the two, and by questioning the question I am carefully paying attention to both layers.

ADINA SECRETAN

Silence is not failure, it's allowed. This means we as dramaturgs don't need to answer questions immediately. By hesitating and postponing, we slow down. Like this, sometimes answers are coming from a different source and form a more emotional rather than a rational place.

MONA DE WEERDT

I consider hesitation, questioning, rejection, and the collective ability to tolerate uncertainty to be important dramaturgical stances and approaches: Questions often cannot be answered directly, nor can decisions be made immediately. Instead, they can only be clarified over the course of the process through further trial and discussion.

JESSICA HUBER

In cases of stagnation, I often suggest taking a day off to take silent nature walks. Walking helps to create a moment of detachment and to set thoughts in motion in order to be able to reengage in the process later. Afterwards we sit together and discuss: What will happen if we rethink this or that? What is it in the piece or material that moves us? What is proving to be really difficult at the moment? Often, simply discussing such questions is enough to bring momentum back into the process.

JOHANNA HILARI

How do we navigate differences in artistic conceptualizations within the team? Who has final say? There are moments when very different perspectives, needs, and tastes clash, and are irreconcilable. As a dramaturg, I can often only filter out part of it at that moment. I then sort through all the feedback from the project participants on my own and mull it over: Where does this come from? How does this or that suggestion dovetail with the piece? What possibilities for the piece arise from a given decision? And then I discuss all of these considerations in a one-to-one meeting with the artistic director.

LYN BENTSCHIK

What I really can't stand is being lost at sea, where nobody knows what we're actually looking for in the end, or where we want to end up. When we try out lots of things, but nothing is really explored in depth or taken further. I find that destabilizing. In my dramaturgical role I then try, together with the artistic team, to sort and categorize things, to clear up the associative chaos, and to determine which direction we should go in next.

# Ant Hill

**Modes of production in contemporary dance are often organized collaboratively. Many processes are characterized by shared responsibility and by group-dynamic processes of negotiation, reflection, and decision-making, leading to burgeoning hustle and bustle. Moments of play often help to generate material between all participants in a project, to reify ideas, and to find one's footing as a team. How do we work together? What tools do we have for co-creation, collective conceptualization, and shared thinking at our disposal?**

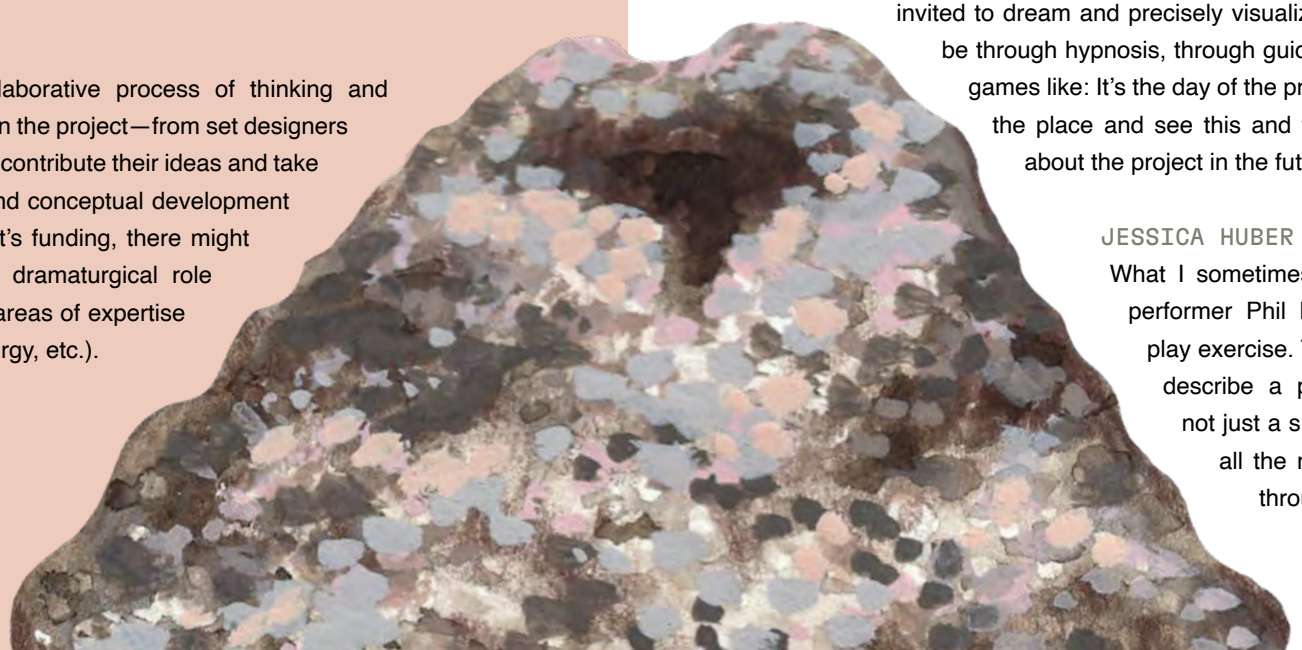
## Collaboration

SELINA BEGHETTO

An artistic production is a team effort. We are in this together! Personal needs are important, but if individual needs become too central—if we (only) get hung up on individualism—it won't work. In an artistic process, everyone has to learn to put their own needs aside sometimes. It takes perseverance, endurance, hanging in there together, and sometimes a little push, too.

MONA DE WEERDT

I understand dramaturgy as a collaborative process of thinking and creating, in which everyone involved in the project—from set designers and sound artists to performers—can contribute their ideas and take an active role in the dramaturgical and conceptual development of the piece. Depending on a project's funding, there might even be the option of dividing the dramaturgical role among different people with various areas of expertise (e.g., text dramaturgy, digital dramaturgy, etc.).



LYN BENTSCHIK

As a dramaturg I always reflect on my position within the project throughout the process: What role(s) can I take on? How can I be critical yet gentle at the same time? Where does my responsibility lie, and where does it end? When and where do I need to stand my ground, and where do my capacities end?

## Tools

ADINA SECRETAN

One tool I use as much as I can is something I call "finding research games." The tool is to propose a little moment for people to collect their ideas into a "basket of possible research games." It is encouraging the team very concretely to not spend the whole week in the rehearsal space as usual, but to find moments for other proposals. Sometimes that brings new things, spatially. For example someone would say: I invite you outside. Let's do this and that, let's go to an attraction park because our subject has to do with vertigo. This is a fancy and ideal way to do it, but in real life we—often timewise—don't always manage to actually do it. And then afterwards, I often say to the team that now we have those games, this collection, and we can use it when we are stuck.

ADINA SECRETAN

One method I regularly use is fictionalizing the future project: The team is invited to dream and precisely visualize the project in the future. It can be through hypnosis, through guided meditation or little imaginative games like: It's the day of the premiere, I am the spectator, I enter the place and see this and that. This invites us to speculate about the project in the future.

JESSICA HUBER

What I sometimes offer—inspired by director and performer Phil Hayes—is a kind of imaginative play exercise. The idea is simply to set forth and describe a piece—actually the entire piece, not just a single scene. The prompt is: Using all the material we have today, walk me through the piece (describe the play

to me), as if the premiere were taking place tonight. And actually do it from A to Z, with lighting and sound. This helps to bring a sense of lightness, to pretend, perhaps to give voice to hidden desires and visions, and to move away from individual scene work. This game can be played at almost any point within the process, but especially in the beginning phases or in moments of stagnation.



ARU RAY TORMANN

A method that I sometimes use:
In order to have a conversation about what we're actually doing here, we simply ask each other questions; instead of answering a question, we ask another question that arises from the previous one. In this way, a collectivized form of questioning takes place, and a shared field of vision of the artistic process is formulated.

ADINA SECRETAN

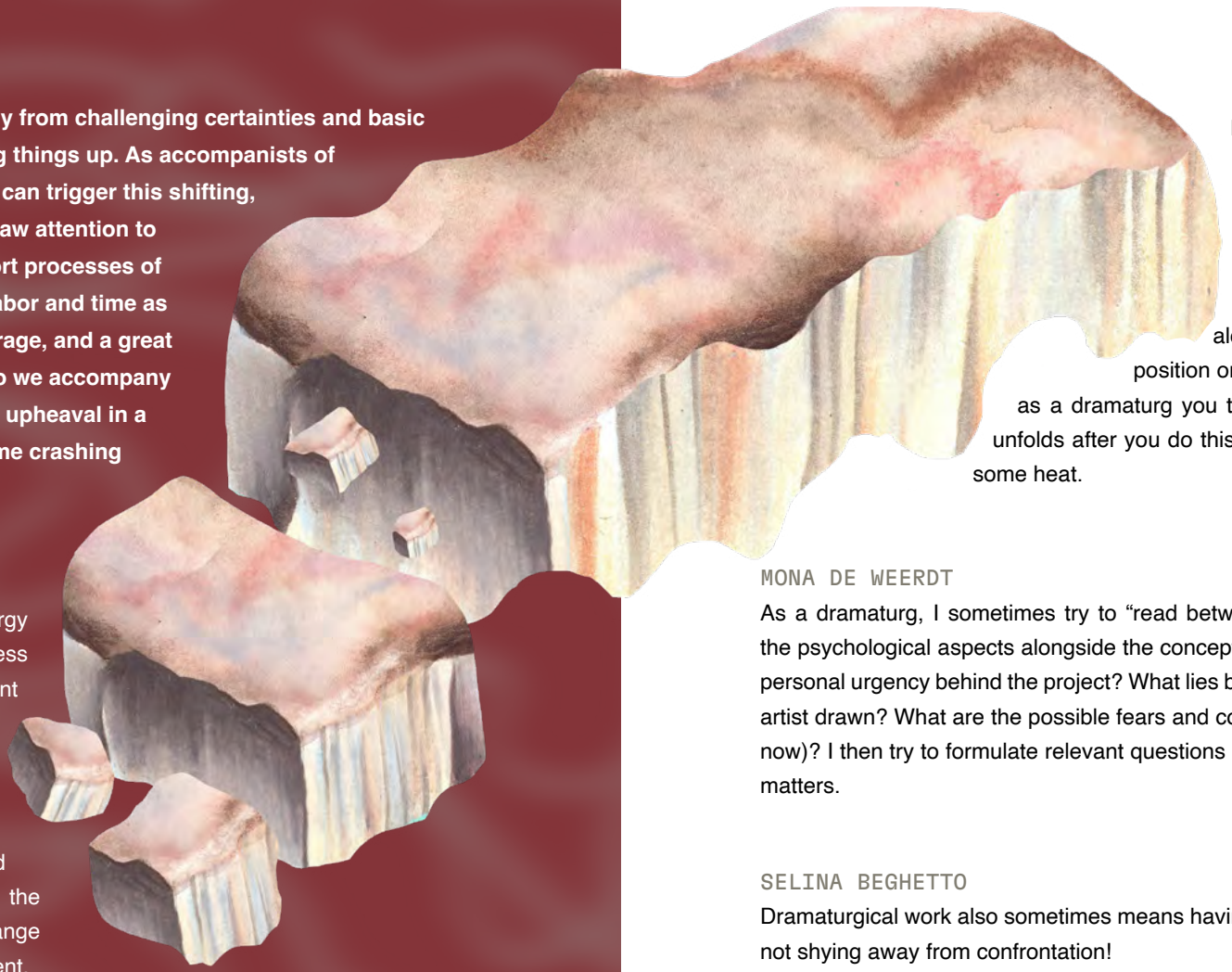
"Mapping the project" is a collective method. The idea is that every person from the team draws the project and then presents it to the others. This is super interesting, because it helps every person to listen to the language of the others, to listen to what words are chosen, where the focus is, and how the others see and talk about the project. It's not about finding a common ground, it's about looking at the richness and diversity of perspectives within an artistic process.

ADINA SECRETAN

One role I propose in projects that everyone in the team can take on is what I call the "Meta-Beast." To me, this role is about trying to orient the process, the people, the energy of the day—not towards what we do, but on how we do it. You can do this famous step-back and look and reflect on how we do things. This "Meta-Beast" position aims to find new methodologies of how we work.

# Earthquake

**Art-making benefits enormously from challenging certainties and basic assumptions, and from shaking things up. As accompanists of artistic processes, dramaturgs can trigger this shifting, question entrenched norms, draw attention to necessary changes, and support processes of reorganisation. This requires labor and time as well as a solid foundation, courage, and a great amount of mutual trust. How do we accompany such phases of unlearning and upheaval in a way that the debris doesn't come crashing down around us?**



ARU RAY TORMANN

I also see the role of dramaturgy as one of reshuffling the process and toppling certainties. I want to create a positive sense of bewilderment within the process of artistic production. At the same time, I see it as my responsibility to support and sustain the process, so that all the reshuffled elements can rearrange themselves and settle like sediment.

MEREL HEERING

I wouldn't underestimate courage. Because to be a dramaturg for me means to put the finger where it hurts. And it often demands courage to do so and to stand alone with your observations, position or opinion in a group process. Also, as a dramaturg you then need to hold space for what unfolds after you do this. So, you have to be able to take some heat.

MONA DE WEERDT

As a dramaturg, I sometimes try to "read between the lines" and to understand the psychological aspects alongside the conceptual and artistic ideas: What is the personal urgency behind the project? What lies beneath it? In which direction is the artist drawn? What are the possible fears and concerns that remain unspoken (for now)? I then try to formulate relevant questions in order to get to the crux of these matters.

SELINA BEGHETTO

Dramaturgical work also sometimes means having the courage to be fearless, and not shying away from confrontation!

# Sponge

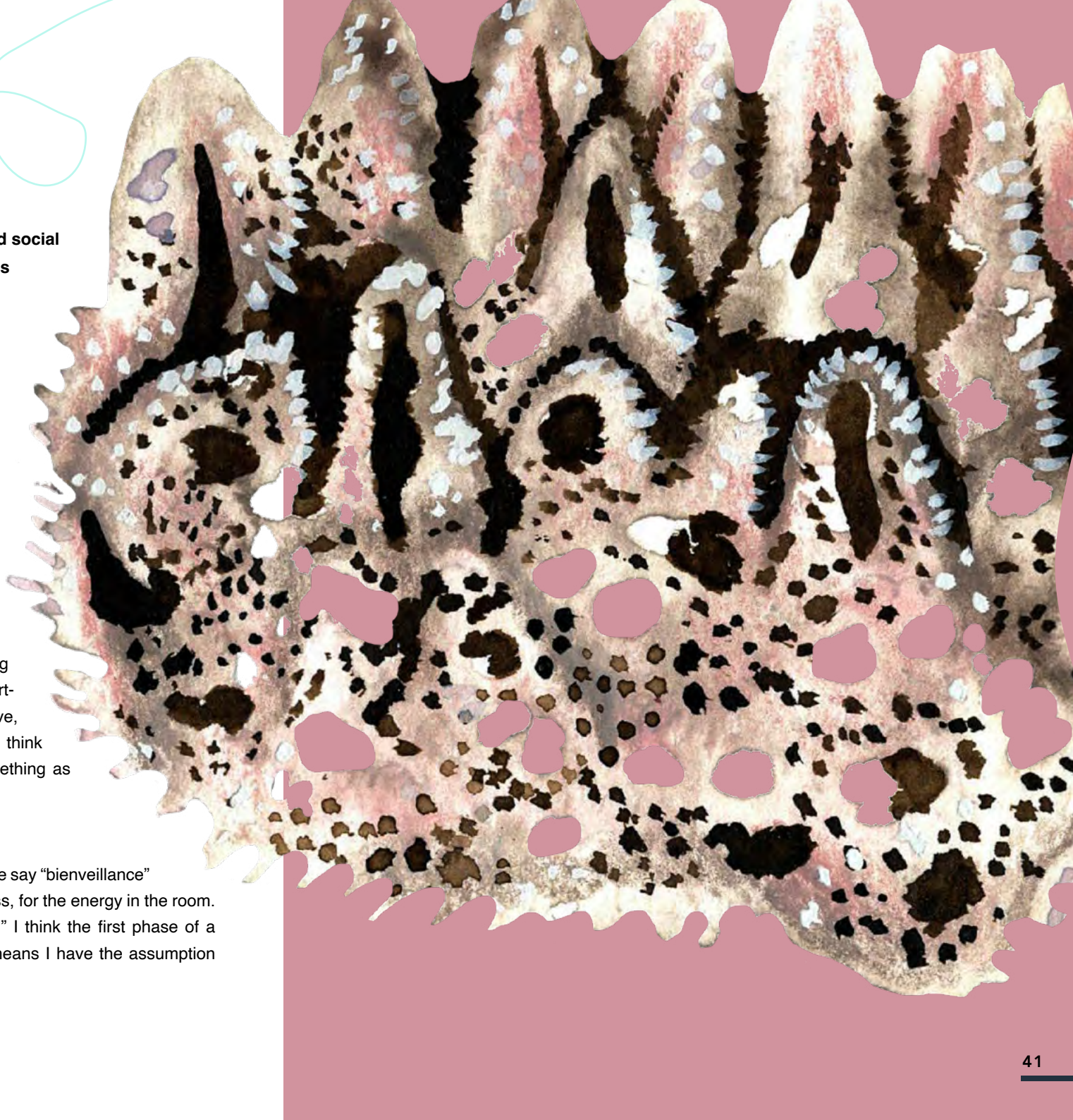
**Dramaturgical work takes place within both artistic and social structures and is often described as care work: It forms a tightly-woven fabric shared by everyone in the team by providing knowledge and perspectives. It can filter tensions and absorb emotions. This caring dimension can also prove to be problematic in part: For example, in instances when dramaturgical support serves as a long-term workaround for structural precarity, or when the dramaturgical perspective imposes itself on the process following power dynamics which remain unaddressed. Furthermore, it is important for dramaturgs to consider how to care enough, but not too much.**

LYN BENTSCHIK

I experience dramaturgy as care work, because sharing artistic ideas and creative processes with others makes art-makers vulnerable. As such, I prefer to remain in a supportive, caring role rather than engaging in confrontation. I don't think it's necessary to introduce too much harshness into something as delicate as choreographic–artistic creation.

ADINA SECRETAN

One skill I believe is required in my practice is—in French we say "bienveillance" (well-wishing)—wanting good for the people, for the process, for the energy in the room. It has to do with the intention of "'massaging the fear(s)." I think the first phase of a process is only about that: "massaging the fear," which means I have the assumption that there is a lot of fear in a creative process.



MONICA GILLETTE

When working as a dramaturg, for me the question is always: How to be human-centered and sensitive, but critical at the same time?

MEREL HEERING

Care can quickly start leaning towards saviorism. Therefore, care always needs to go hand in hand with a practice in integrity and truth-telling with yourself and with others.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

In collaborations it is crucial to recognize, articulate, and take into consideration a variety of needs. One example is Crip Time. For instance, whenever I work with Crip* artists or artists with chronic illnesses, it's important to take Crip Time into account and ask questions such as, How much can we accomplish (in a day, in a week)? What can we accomplish and when? This gives a project another temporality and another production logic.

*Crip is a term used by some members of the community of people with disabilities or chronic illnesses as a positive self-identifier. Crip* refers to the intersectionality of disability and other experiences of marginalization.*

VALERIE WEHRENS

I find it important to have a quick check-in at the start of every rehearsal, especially during processes in which group dynamics can be rather challenging: Where are we right now? How are we feeling today? How are we feeling at the start of today's rehearsal? It doesn't always work out, but sometimes it can help to momentarily deconstruct hierarchies as well as to bring the issue of stress and how to deal with it into the group as a shared concern, rather than taking it out on one another.



LISA LEOPOLD

Throughout the process, I find it important to continually check in with the choreographer and the group to get a feel for what is needed at that moment. Is it perhaps a question of mirroring what has been seen and observed, asking questions, sharing impressions? We can also open up a meta-level in the sense of: Where do you feel you haven't been fully brought into the fold, what do you need, is anything missing—in the collaboration, in the piece?

SELINA BEGHETTO

Being a dramaturg is about continually encouraging the artists and to believe in them as well as in the project itself.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

As a dramaturg, you need the ability to empathize with different people, perspectives, and approaches. At the same time, you have to set boundaries so you don't end up taking on every possible task.

JESSICA HUBER

The dramaturg's role is to be present and yet as invisible as possible. And to support the artistic director or choreographer throughout the process and have their back.

# Crystal

**Art-making is a creative yet serious process that involves tremendous deliberation, discussion, planning, and decision-making. The navigation of challenging moments also makes up a significant part of artistic work. But that's not all! Without enjoyment, fun, and joy—as well as some spark and glitter—even the best workflow remains uninspired. Sometimes what is needed is downtime and space in order for spontaneity and a sense of playfulness to emerge. How can dramaturgs bring about such valuable moments?**

CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

Having fun when I do artistic and dramaturgical work is super important to me! The focus should be centered around: We're in this together, working towards a shared goal, and it's an experience for all of us. Processes and pieces should be profound and unrestrained, but they should also be playful and possess a certain lightness. Whether this succeeds depends largely on the working conditions that are created.

SELINA BEGHETTO

Artistic and dramaturgical work also means having a good time together, recognizing the privilege of making art together, enjoying oneself, and not taking oneself too seriously! Having fun.

MEREL HEERING

I see dramaturgy as a process of aligning vision and actions. Within the environment of a collaboration, we practice embodied learning and accountability together, on a heart level. And I believe that how you charge a room and the presence you have in it will eventually be reflected in the end result.

ADINA SECRETAN

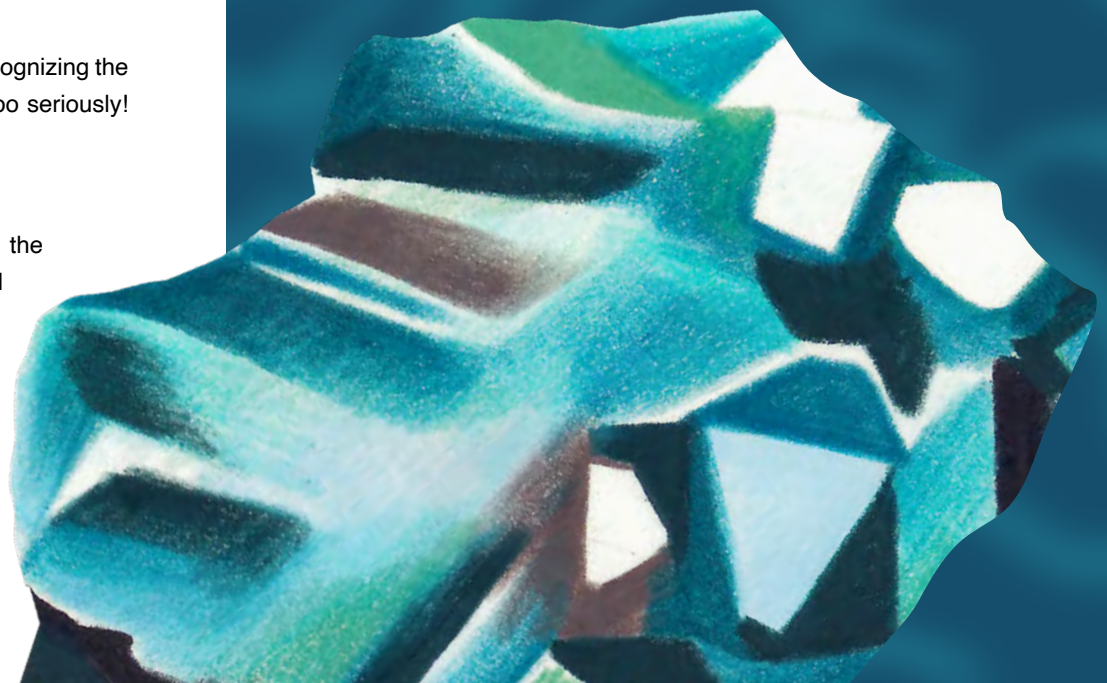
As a dramaturg, I also have to see and point out where the luminous part, the potential, the spark is.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

When it comes to the piece, we can ask during the process: Is there some sort of risk involved—conceptual, aesthetical, spatial, thematic, and so on? Is there humor? Where's the magic?

JESSICA HUBER

I believe that in good dance pieces, the performers know why they're making a certain movement, why a moment possesses a certain intensity, and what the emotion, atmosphere, quality, and intention is. That is what makes a piece moving. This is where I often exercise my dramaturgical muscle to clarify things. For example: Why are the performers running? And why have they (suddenly) stopped? Because they're exhausted, listless, disoriented, or because the others have stopped? Clarifying such things together with the choreographer and the performers is something I really enjoy in my dramaturgical work.



# Kaleidoscope

**Reflecting on the context in which their art is created is an important task for artists to undertake, as historical mechanisms of oppression or hegemonic narratives exert influence on the artistic processes. An intersectional lens allows us to reveal whether and how an artistic work (consciously or unconsciously) reproduces, comments on, disrupts or interrupts such structures. What are our goals in this respect? The dramaturgical function then consists of observing, questioning, critically analyzing, specifying, and mirroring. And if we remain in motion, sometimes the slightest shifts or changes in perspective can lead to an entirely new viewpoint and reality.**

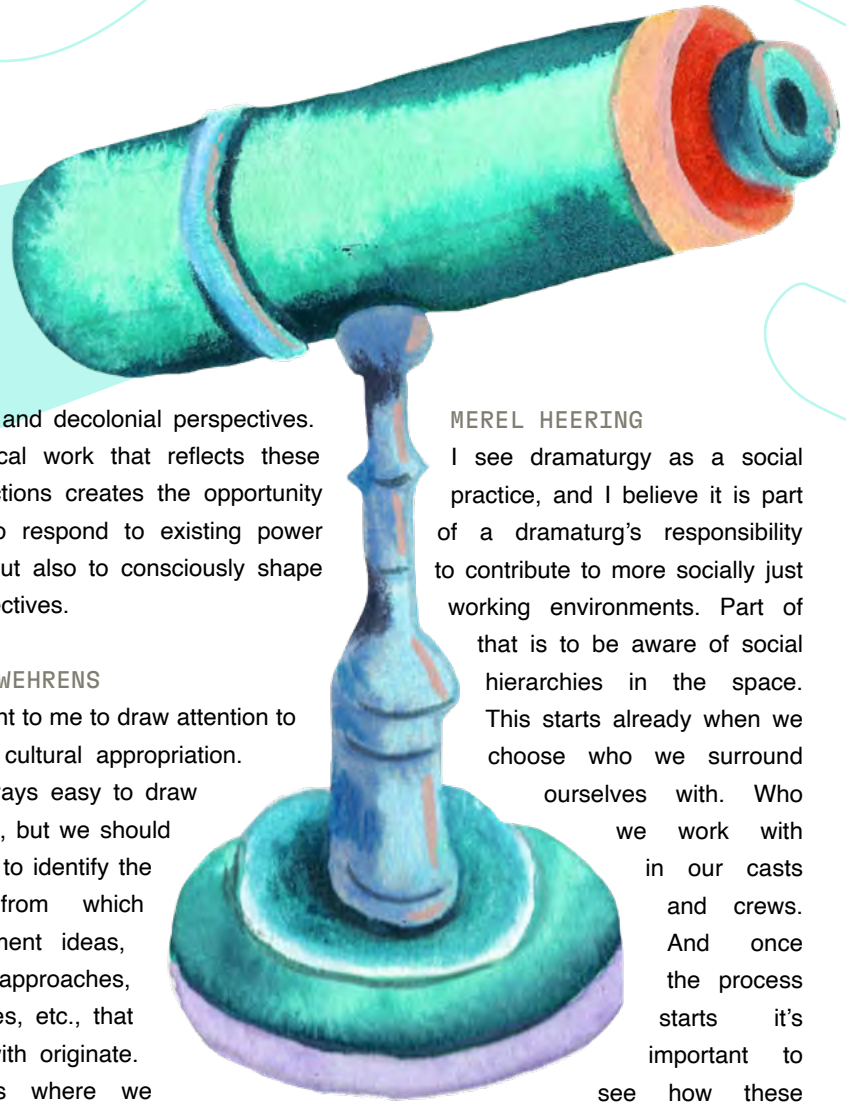


CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

Intersectional dramaturgical thinking is as important to me within giving shape to the process as it is in connection to the artistic project. Which bodies are represented onstage, and which are not? Who is (made) visible, and how? Which (invisible) power structures are present? Who decides on which aspects of the work, or who makes decisions around the labor itself: working hours, working methods, etc.?

LISA LEOPOLD

Generally, I believe it is important to identify references that hold hegemonic dynamics or exclusions so as to avoid reproducing them. Dramaturgical practice involves questioning prevailing structures and viewpoints. For example, we can ask critically: Why this costume? Why this sound? These questions draw attention to something in order to verify where it's coming from and whether an artistic decision is actually congruous. For me, it's also the question of taking seriously the concept of "re-centering"—not merely as a critique of existing structures, but as an active shift in focus towards feminist, ecological, and decolonial perspectives. Dramaturgical work that reflects these interconnections creates the opportunity not only to respond to existing power relations, but also to consciously shape new perspectives.



VALERIE WEHRENS

It's important to me to draw attention to things like cultural appropriation. It's not always easy to draw a clear line, but we should at least try to identify the contexts from which the movement ideas, aesthetic approaches, dance styles, etc., that we work with originate. In projects where we use a lot of references, I try to push for making their origins visible and citing references or sources in the program notes. Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen amidst the hectic rush of final rehearsals.

MEREL HEERING

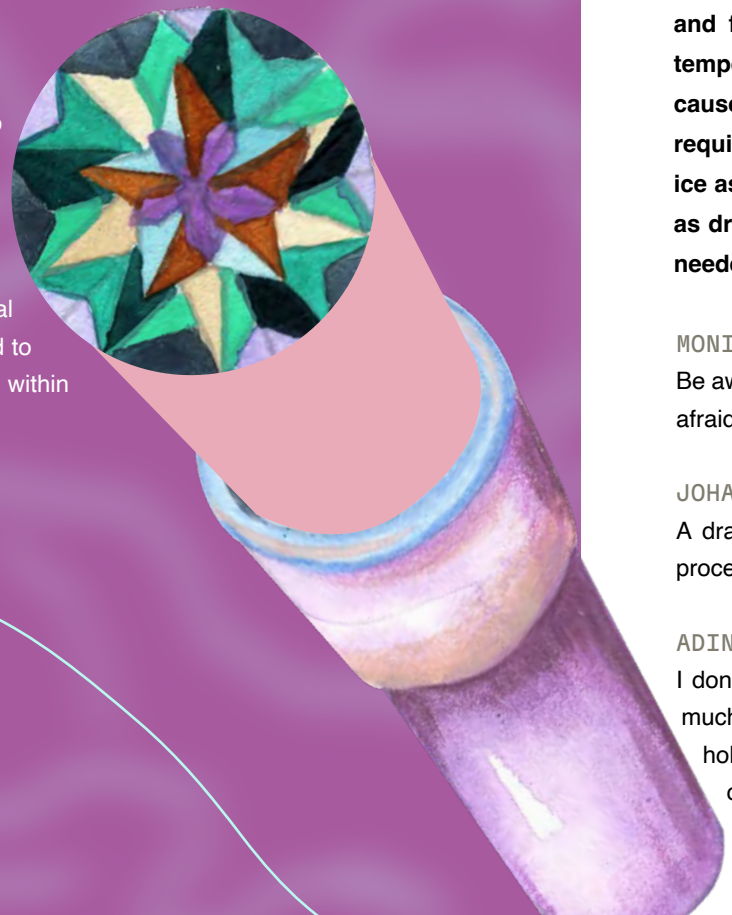
I see dramaturgy as a social practice, and I believe it is part of a dramaturg's responsibility to contribute to more socially just working environments. Part of that is to be aware of social hierarchies in the space. This starts already when we choose who we surround ourselves with. Who we work with in our casts and crews. And once the process starts it's important to see how these hierarchies play out in the collaboration in the space. Who is included, who isn't? Who is at ease, who isn't? Who speaks, who doesn't? Where is the collaboration and creation flowing? Where does it get stuck? It's in reflecting back those dynamics and hierarchies that I believe we as dramaturgs can play a role in changing working cultures.

ANNE-LAURE SAHY

I really like to work with what I call “filters”—as in, (metaphorical) light filters or sunglasses. These filters are means of observing, of guiding my perceptions. Sensorially they activate different modes of observation, if, for example, I focus on “proprioception”, “movement within stillness”, “balance”, “temperature”, “volume”, or “empty spaces”. It’s a reservoir of keywords that change my perspective. Is there a “ritual” to it? Is there an “accumulation”? Is there “humus”? It allows me to transform and nourish my focus. I can also push myself to intertwine two of these, if my concentration allows. These are observational constraints that are likely to reveal what isn’t immediately obvious.

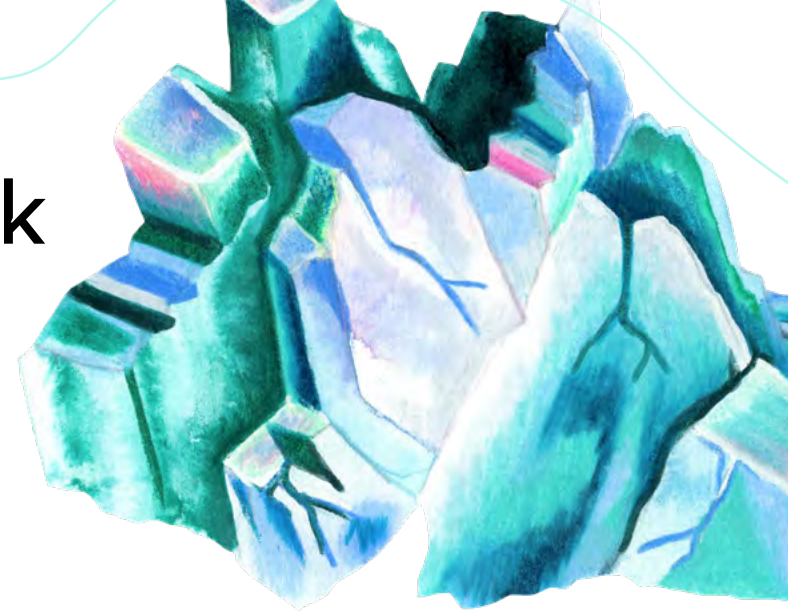
LYN BENTSCHIK

I bring a Crip-queerfeminist perspective to my work and I view gender as non-binary. I come from a dance and long-term performance background, I am white, hold a university degree, and I am a parent. These factors shape my dramaturgical practice. I am, for instance, highly attuned to power dynamics and gender hierarchies within work processes.





# Block of Ice



**Artistic processes are always social processes, too—and are therefore intimate and fragile. Trust can be built up, but it can also be lost anew. Too great a temperature difference or applying too much pressure in the wrong place can cause lasting fractures, which can lead to a rupture. As such, certain moments require us to be particularly careful about whether we want to venture onto thin ice as well as which processes we set in motion and how. What should we avoid as dramaturgs, what should we pay particular attention to, and where is caution needed?**

MONICA GILLETTE

Be aware how you enter and contribute to a space. It shouldn’t make anyone nervous or afraid when you’re around.

JOHANNA HILARI

A dramaturg must be able to grapple with contradictions and bring patience to the process.

ADINA SECRETAN

I don’t allow myself to put my problems, anxieties, etc. into a space! I don’t show so much my own vulnerability because I see my responsibility as holding the space. This holding it together also brings a certain exhaustion, specifically when jumping from one project to another.

ARU RAY TORMANN

I see dramaturgy as a practice that fosters dissent. It is nevertheless very important to me for it always to remain clear that this bewildering and raising of doubts takes place on a professional level; that it remains artistic feedback, not personal criticism.

LYN BENTSCHIK

I always intuitively try to figure out how I can get to points of vulnerability with the people I work with. What does it take for people to open up? Because I believe that, in order to offer criticism or to be able to think critically together, first and foremost there needs to be a solid foundation of trust.

VALERIE WEHRENS

Dramaturgy is relationship-building. In artistic processes, it's also a question of making ourselves vulnerable to one another, because the personal inevitably influences the artistic.

MARIE ALEXIS

As a dramaturg I must set aside my personal preferences in order to evaluate the quality of the piece objectively, without letting my own taste exert influence.

ALEXANDRA HENNIG

As a dramaturg, I have a responsibility to the piece and to the performers, because they are the ones who will ultimately be performing it in front of audiences. This requires honesty and yet a critical eye as well.

MEREL HEERING

The intrinsic intimacy of working with someone who is trying to externalize and create something that is dear to them often involves parts of their personal struggles, questions, traumas, lived experiences. Creation, as much as leadership, has a way of showing us where we are stuck, where we can still grow or dig deeper, or are ready to confront something that has been with us for a long time. And through that, we often touch parts of things that could be considered collective traumas or points of pain in our society. Therefore, it is not possible to practice dramaturgy without developing a sensitivity for how these parts of people show up and need to be held in order to support them in creating the work and the working process that they are after.

JOHANNA HILARI

As a dramaturg it is important to me to be a trusted point of contact for everyone involved in the project. I make certain that everyone is able to express their views during the process and I also act as timekeeper. I ensure that time resources are not overstretched and that the personal needs and boundaries of everyone involved in the project are respected.

ADINA SECRETAN

Sometimes there is this idea that the dramaturg is the ally of the choreographer, so that, for example, the dancers think after the rehearsal the choreographer and dramaturg will have a "secret meeting" and criticize. I do not work like this at all, I never have private or secret conversations with a choreographer.



ANNE-LAURE SAHY

I want to dissolve the sanctity of the role of dramaturg. And to accomplish that, I make good use of humor, irony, and self-deprecation. These should be used sparingly and with care, but they generally make relationships and the work itself more relaxed. For example, when the moment arises, I like to remind people that what we do is important and serious, but also not really all that serious either. Dramaturgy that diminishes the pomp of it all is also an interesting alternative.

# Sign Post

**Dramaturgy is often described as a practice of accompaniment and orientation. It involves moments that provide an overview and redirect the work in question. How can dramaturgy suggest directions of movement without imposing them upon the artistic process? How can dramaturgy open decision-making processes? It's often during moments of crisis that the way forward reveals itself, depending on which suggestions we follow or which off-ramp we take. Do we take the arduous path or the short-cut? Do we proceed straight ahead or can we also enjoy the detours, diversions, and wrong turns?**

ARU RAY TORMANN

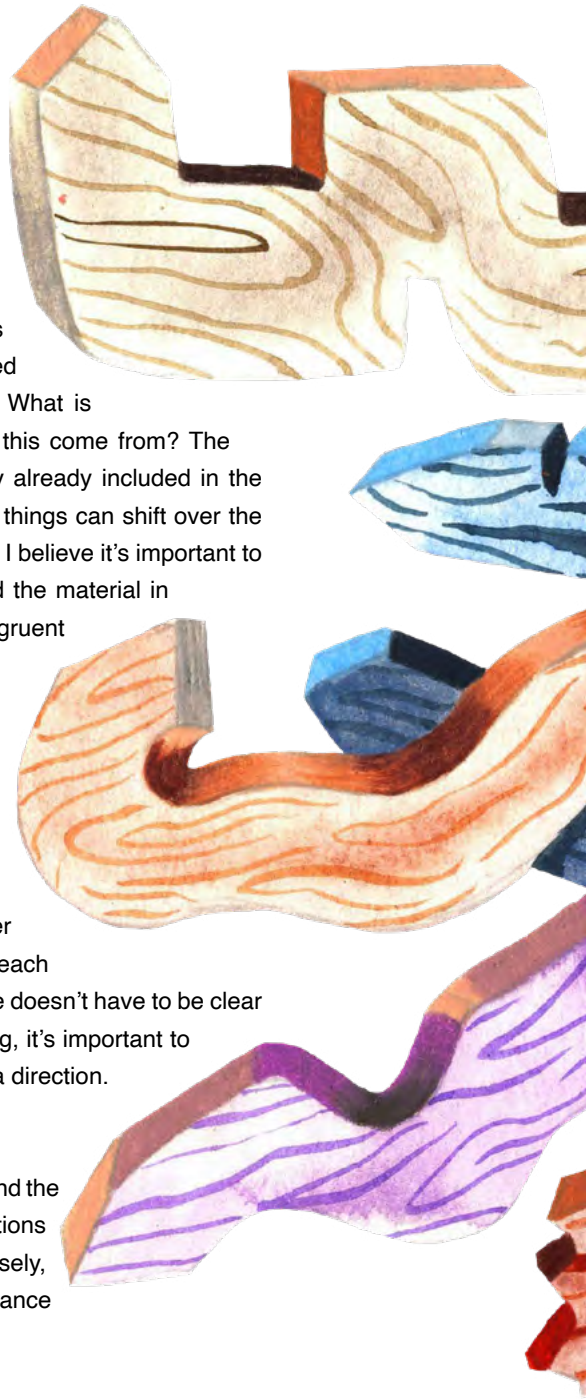
Dramaturgy must make space for dissent. I view dramaturgy as a practice of disorientation. It should create space for detours rather than merely putting things into order, as this would only be following a neoliberal, capitalist production logic. There is something discomforting about dramaturgy. It reshuffles the process, topples certainties, and challenges us to engage our artistic questions, methods and working practices in dialogue with the context in which we work.

In my dramaturgical practice I am most interested in creating a substantive disorientation alongside connecting more closely with the people I work with.

MARIE ALEXIS

For me, dramaturgical work involves setting up guard rails and then making sure that we don't stray too far from them within the process. It's about seeking out and finding the appropriate artistic strategies and means to translate a theme. As a dramaturg, however, I avoid actively making artistic decisions; instead, I offer visions and perspectives, such as: If you take decision A, this will happen… If you take decision B, the result will be this… Or I return to the original idea: Your artistic idea or vision is this. If you go off course, then this will happen…





CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

In dramaturgical work questions regarding themes and urgency are posed on a practical level: What's your aim? What is it you all are looking for? Where does this come from? The answers to these questions are usually already included in the project dossier as reference points, but things can shift over the course of the creative process. As such, I believe it's important to keep checking whether the dossier and the material in development remain consistent and congruent with the questions and objectives.

VALERIE WEHRENS

Dramaturgical practice demands a certain decisiveness and creative drive. This requires soft skills such as empathy and interpersonal tactfulness, and, most importantly, a feeling for proper timing—knowing what is needed at each stage of the process. The action onstage doesn't have to be clear from the start, but for me as a dramaturg, it's important to sense that there is a certain approach, a direction.

LYN BENTSCHIK

Depending on the stage of the process and the situation, we may need to propose options by putting them into words—or, conversely, to narrow down options in order to advance the development of the piece.

ANNE-LAURE SAHY

In my role as “facilitator of the dramaturgical,” I communicate with everyone but I generally have a special relationship with the person who is the artistic lead and has most of the responsibility for the project. We share many private moments of discussion; we prioritise, sort things out, decide on next steps, and broach any tensions that may exist in order to find the best way to resolve them.

MONA DE WEERDT

As a dramaturg, I sometimes have to accept when decisions are made that don’t align with my artistic vision for the piece, or that I feel are not in the best interest of the piece. And yet, I still support and guide the process going forward, along with the decisions that have been made.

MARIE ALEXIS

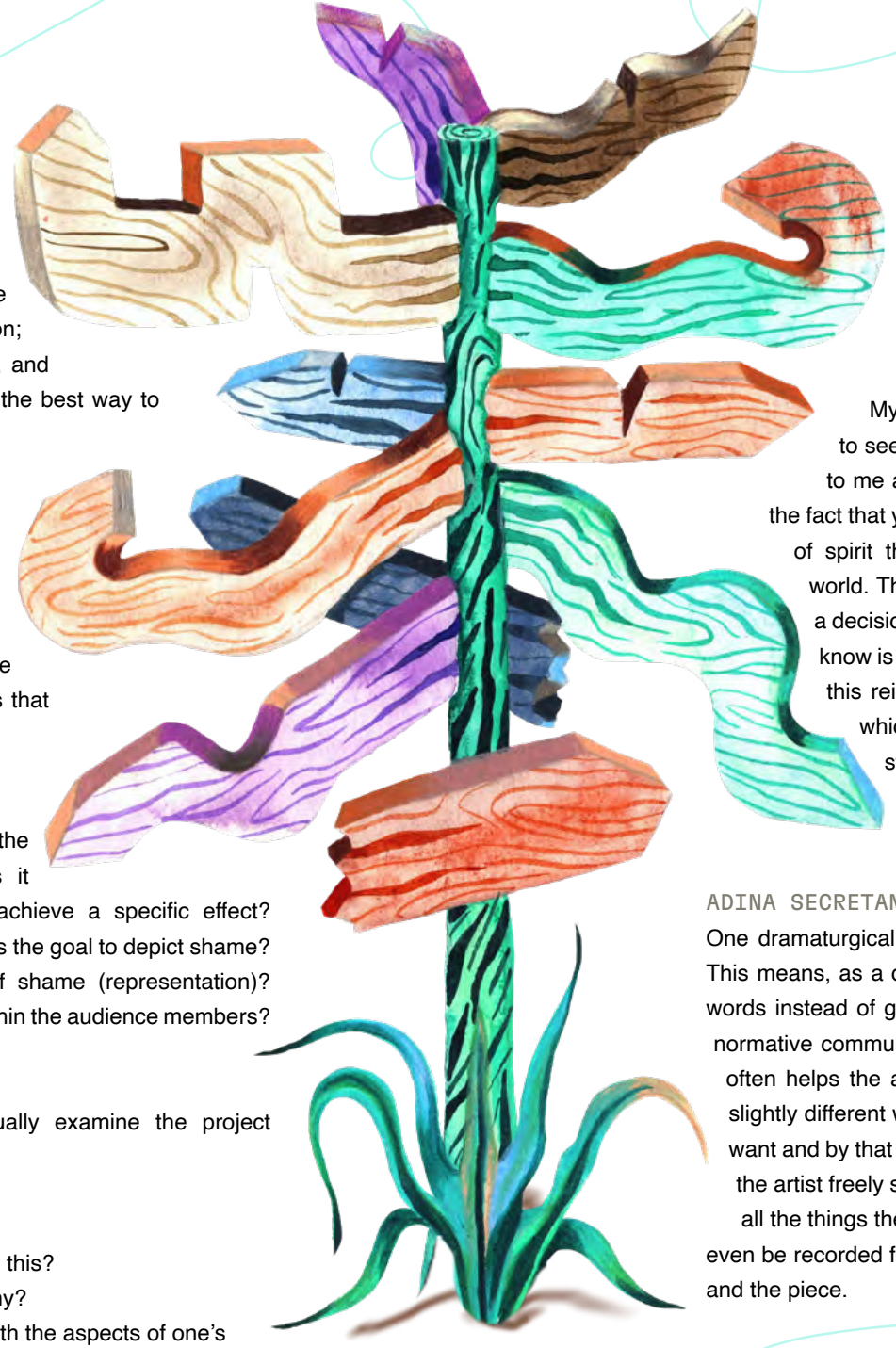
It is essential to continually clarify with the choreographer what the piece is striving for: Is it about representation, or is the piece aiming to achieve a specific effect? A concrete example: a piece on the topic of shame. Is the goal to depict shame? Do we want to shed light on different aspects of shame (representation)? Or does the piece aim to trigger (vicarious) shame within the audience members?

CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

Throughout the process it’s important to continually examine the project and one’s own work:

- Are we doing what we want to be doing?
- Is the piece doing what we want it to be doing?
- From which perspectives have we not yet looked at this?
- What impact does the material have on me, and why?

The last question in particular naturally resonates with the aspects of one’s own identity, perception, and positionality.

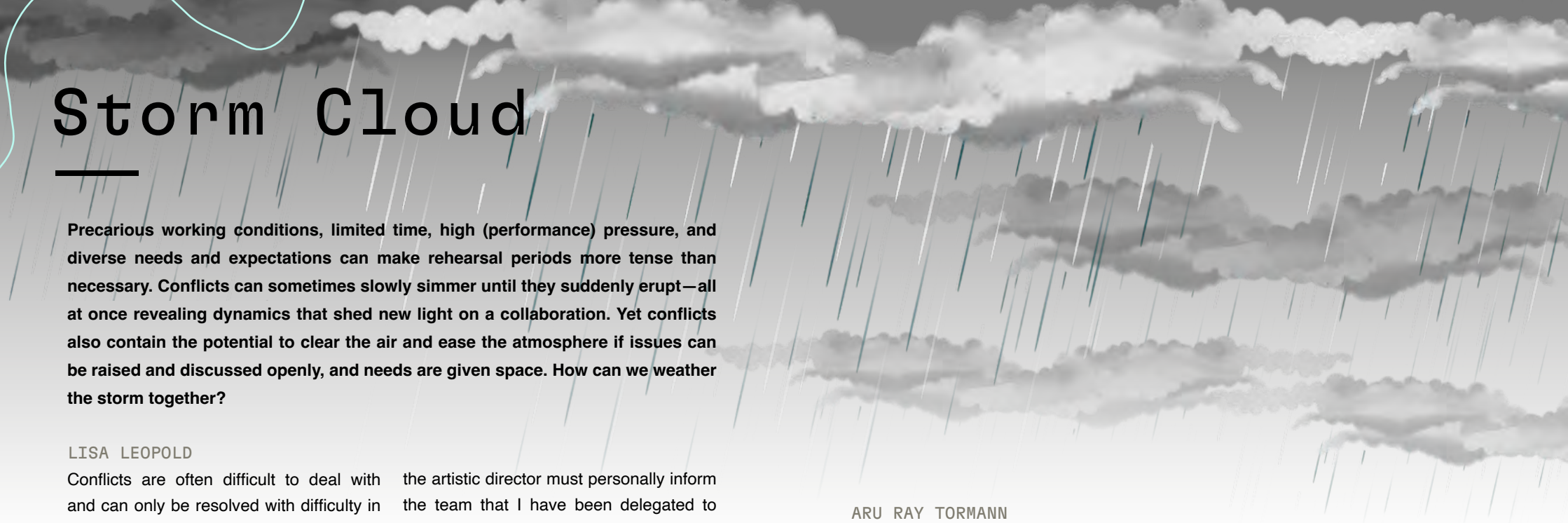


ANNE-LAURE SAHY

My new skill is being able to change my mind. I used to see this as a flaw or a failure, but that’s no longer true to me at all. Changing your mind and being conscious of the fact that you don’t have all the answers allows for a flexibility of spirit that is essential to entering into someone else’s world. This doesn’t stop me from not entirely agreeing with a decision or trying to sway it with all my subjectivity, which I know is temporary and changeable—even if, paradoxically, this reinforces a decision I don’t entirely agree with and which isn’t my own. For example, I once argued so strongly in favor of a second option for a show’s title that it actually led the project leader to realize that she preferred the first one.

ADINA SECRETAN

One dramaturgical practice I use is what I call the “echo chamber.” This means, as a dramaturg, I repeat what the artist said in my own words instead of giving answers or advice. This breaks the circle of normative communication of question—answer, question—advice. It often helps the artists just to hear their ideas and formulations in slightly different words in order to figure out what they want or don’t want and by that bringing the process further. One task I use is to let the artist freely say the sentence: I want… or I don’t want… and list all the things they want or don’t want for like five minutes. This can even be recorded for later or be used like a manifesto for the process and the piece.



# Storm Cloud

**Precarious working conditions, limited time, high (performance) pressure, and diverse needs and expectations can make rehearsal periods more tense than necessary. Conflicts can sometimes slowly simmer until they suddenly erupt—all at once revealing dynamics that shed new light on a collaboration. Yet conflicts also contain the potential to clear the air and ease the atmosphere if issues can be raised and discussed openly, and needs are given space. How can we weather the storm together?**

LISA LEOPOLD

Conflicts are often difficult to deal with and can only be resolved with difficulty in the midst of the artistic process. What I sometimes suggest is creating a dedicated repository in the sense of a temporally defined encounter to clear up conflicts. In doing so, we should distinguish between emotional circumstances and the artistic process. Where exactly does the problem lie? It is important not to lose sight of where we want to go together and our commitment to ensuring that a good piece will emerge from the process.

JESSICA HUBER

In cases of conflict or impasses, I try to first speak with the artistic director and work with them to find a path forward. Ideally, the artistic director will then hold a meeting with the team, unless the situation is so tense that I am asked to take over this conciliatory talk. But even in this instance, the artistic director must personally inform the team that I have been delegated to lead the discussion. This is important for preserving the integrity of both their and my position as well as that of all the individuals involved. We then need to establish: What will the timeframe be? In which room will we hold this discussion? Will we do it in the rehearsal room or at a different, neutral location? Who will be participating in the discussion? Etc.

MONICA GILLETTE

When tensions are high, I try to be a diffuser and to change the energy in the space. This can be with the tone or voice I use or through how I consider my presence in the space. I may propose taking a break or taking distance from what we are doing to diffuse the tension and open space for alternative pathways to be found.

ARU RAY TORMANN

In instances of conflict, it's important for me to honestly ask: Can I mediate this conflict, or is an external party needed? Sometimes it makes sense to hold an intervention workshop with as many participants as possible in order to identify the root cause of an impasse or conflict and to determine: Is it artistic, structural, or personal? This makes it possible to address and discuss uncomfortable issues within a clearly defined framework.

JESSICA HUBER

When tensions arise, I offer my Rituals of Tenderness exercises, in which pairs or groups engage in practices such as humming or gentle rocking movements. These are exercises that calm the nervous system and help to shift it to a parasympathetic state. It is one form of entering into a caring and intimate interchange with one another. In this way, the project participants can engage in a physical and sensory encounter that is not directly related to the piece, thereby reconnecting with one another.

VALERIE WEHRENS

For sure, there are cases where people consciously go their separate ways after having worked together. Sometimes I'm not entirely sure whether these rifts stem purely from differing aesthetic preferences. Professional and emotional tendencies often get mixed in with incompatible communication styles.

# Toolbox



**Every artistic project contains new demands and challenges, and calls for its own dramaturgical working methods and strategies. Over the years, we as dramaturgs have built up a small collection of tools that we can apply or adapt. Games and practical exercises can help to reify ideas, rethink existing concepts and proliferate them boundlessly, activate the entire team, or catalyze a certain segment of the creative process. What tools do we bring along? And how can we (continually) add to our toolbox?**

## Tools for the project start

MARIE ALEXIS

I use the so-called five Ws to mark out a project:

Who—what—why—where—how?

- Who is involved?
- What is the topic?
- Why is it personally or politically urgent?
- Where will it be realized and presented?
- How is it going to be implemented artistically, conceptually, choreographically, and dramaturgically?

JOHANNA HILARI

At the start of a collaboration, I work with a questionnaire. Most of the answers to these questions are in the dossier, but it's always good to hear them again and make a note of them, not least because they may change as the process unfolds. A few of the questions are also directed at myself. I note down the answers in some detail; they serve as a framework for the coming weeks, which I can refer back to (if necessary).

The following are examples of situations in which these questions might be asked:

- The initial meeting following the commitment to enter into a collaboration for the first time.
- The first rehearsal that I attend, with the whole team or part of the team.
- A meeting prior to working on a project.
- A first meeting following confirmation (from co-production partners and/or the venue for the premiere, funders).
- In crisis situations, when there is a sense that things have gone off track or that the process has stalled. (In such cases, only a relevant selection of questions should be used.)



1. Can you remember how the idea of creating this piece came about?
2. Who will be involved and why?
3. Do you have any mental images of what the piece should look like? What mood or taste should the project have? Is there perhaps a color or a shape that you associate with the work?
4. What are your hopes for this project (also keeping previous work in mind)?
5. Where will the work be shown, and do you have a special connection to this space or these spaces, or to this institution?
6. Do you have any concrete ideas regarding movement material, sequences, scenes, musicality, etc.?
7. What do you understand dramaturgy to be? What do I understand dramaturgy to be?
8. What are your expectations of me, in terms of dramaturgy? What do you hope for me to contribute?
9. How do you feel about showings/sharings, and why?
10. How much time in total do you have to work on the project? And how much time does each member of the team have to devote to the project?
11. Do you have any questions?
12. From what positionality am I supporting this process?

## Tools for feedback

LISA LEOPOLD

When I first encounter the material, I try to sort through my impressions in order to find a fitting framework and to communicate it. I usually start with open-ended questions, which are oriented toward not only clarification but the unfurling of new paths as well. The subsequent step is to share my impressions—at which point a framework becomes important in terms of communicating associations, feelings, perceptions, etc., which I place in relation to my own positionality. Questions might include:

- What implicit ideas regarding space, context, costume, music, etc. are already in existence but have not yet been articulated and/or made visible?
- Are there any intentions regarding what is to be expressed or conveyed?
- What impression is given—as an outside eye/outside ear—in relation to these?
- What questions arise?
- What associations come to mind, as a subjective observer?
- What sensory or emotional impressions/abrasions arise?
- What is needed in the next phase? More input, or rather solidifying and culling?

CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN

Five Fingers Feedback Method:

- **Thumbs up:** That was awesome!
- **Pointer finger:** I'd like to draw your attention to something here.
- **Middle finger:** No good!
- **Ring finger:** What a jewel—definitely keep it in!
- **Pinky finger:** Not enough of…!

VALERIE WEHRENS

I have three questions that guide my feedback during a showing:

- **What do I see?**
- **What moves me?**
- **What remains unresolved?**

- **What do I see?** This question allows me to give a descriptive account on a purely observational and perceptual level before any judgment comes into play, which is important to me.
- **What moves me?** With this question I identify what moves me emotionally, affectively, and corporeally. What pulls at me, what scratches my surface? Here I am reminded of Roland Barthes's "punctum": something that pierces the surface of your body even before you can put it into words.
- **What remains unresolved?** This question aims for a gentle form of criticism and encourages us to clarify: What does the piece still need? What still needs to happen?

ARU RAY TORMANN

I sometimes use the *DasArts feedback method* of switching perspectives to shed light on all the aspects of a piece in greater depth. In this exercise I try to adapt and reify the perspective according to the specific context, and sometimes take things to a point of absurdity. For example, I'll say something like: As a bacterium, I'm still missing this and that… Or: As someone who fears climate catastrophe, I need this and that… This helps to explore and articulate new aspects of a piece.

## Tools for (collective) brainstorming

ADINA SECRETAN

One of my brainstorming methods aims to make use of the group's collective intelligence and draws on memory and intuition rather than theoretical knowledge and rationality. Ideally, every participant in the project—performers, set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, sound artists, etc.—takes part and enriches the project with their experiences, visions, and references. The objective of this playful exercise is to demystify the idea of an (omniscient) dramaturgical position and to tap into the knowledge available within the group.

**The procedure is as follows:**

The artistic director or choreographer of the project in development presents the project in a twelve-minute, free and associative pitch. The project participants are then invited to deepen the project with spontaneous ideas, associations and references over several rounds and in response to specific prompts.

**Round 1 (Memories):** Project participants write down on cards one thing from the presentation that has particularly stuck in their minds. The prompt is, I keep in mind…

**Round 2 (References):** Project participants write down 0–5 references that spring to mind (books, films, images, quotes, anecdotes, etc.).

**Round 3 (Visions, Wishes):** Project participants write down 0–2 visions, visions, or wishes for the project. The wording is, I wish for…

**Round 4 (Questions):** Project participants formulate 0–2 questions about the project.

**Round 5 (Wishes):** The artistic director takes time to consider what they would like in relation to the project or the process, and what they would not like, and formulates this as, I want… or I don't want…

**Round 6 (Research Questions):** the project participants formulate 0–2 research questions for the project.

**Round 7 (Role play):** Project participants "embody" the artistic director—the artistic director asks the project participants questions, which they try to answer from the artistic director's perspective.

**Round 8 (Gossip):** Project participants are allowed to lambast the project in small groups.

**Round 9 (Presentation):** The artistic director gives a short oral or performative presentation featuring selected elements, questions, and references from the group.








# Epilogue

The perspectives gathered and represented in this series of conversations have so far come exclusively from *white* dramaturgs, with whom we talked about how anti-racist and decolonial practice means actively dismantling working environments. This ongoing process of unlearning and questioning is a retrospective endeavour, as its point of departure corresponds to a rather conventional status quo that is marked by violence—and proceeds from there. Productive-destructive visions of how to build structures completely anew are so far missing within our collection of knowledge. Furthermore, perspectives on accessibility measures tend to represent a specific dramaturgical consideration rather than a central point in our discussions.

Among other things, how disproportionately these approaches show up in our interview material demonstrates that there remains much to be done, dismantled, and created anew within contemporary dance and dramaturgical work. We, too, are working toward the aim that the dramaturgical landscape on our website continues to grow in the future and that we engage in more conversations that more firmly center socially marginalised perspectives.

# Resources



**Flower**

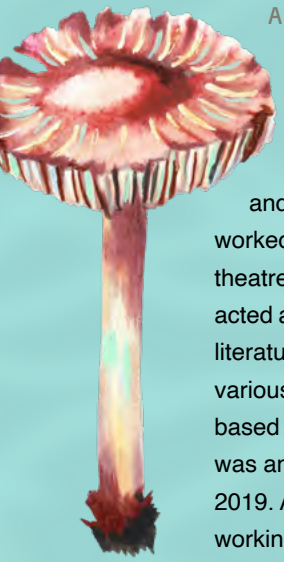
For this project, we spoke with numerous people who have provided us with profound inspiration and materials. You can find these resources here:



**Pencil**

There is a lot that has already been thought, written, and spoken about dramaturgy.
A collection of texts on (dance) dramaturgy can be found here:

# Contributors



ADINA SECRETAN ( SHE / HER )

was born in Geneva in 1980 and studied classical and contemporary dance and acting at the Conservatoire in Geneva. In parallel with a Master's degree in philosophy and modern literature, she continued her training in contemporary dance with *Marchepied Cie* in Lausanne and also studied mediation and dramaturgy. Since 2008, Adina has worked intensively as a dramaturg, choreographer, director, and mediator for theatre, dance, performance, and community dance projects. She has also acted as a research assistant and published magazine articles on philosophy, literature, and the performing arts. Since 2012, she has participated in various collective experiments, some of which she played a part in initiating, based on the principles of knowledge-sharing and self-management. She was an associated artist at the *far° festival of living arts* in Nyon from 2017 to 2019. Adina also campaigns for fair production conditions and pay for people working in the arts.



ALEX HENNIG ( SHE / HER )

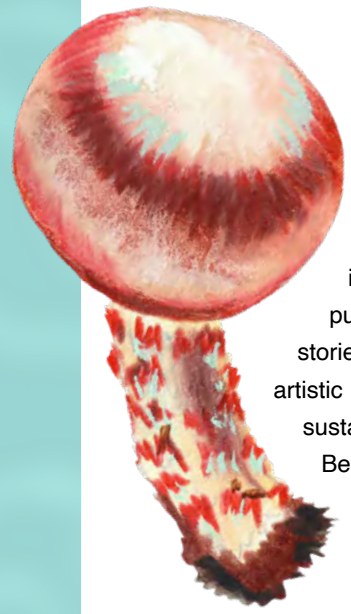
always wanted to be a journalist and even spent several years writing for various magazines and online portals on dance in Berlin. As a dramaturg she has most enjoyed working with solo artists such as Hendrik Quast, Angela Alves, and others on questions centered around classism, humor, and Crip* Time. As a dance scholar, she has extensively explored dance and archives, repressed histories, and the relationship between text and body/writing and dancing. Alex Hennig joined the *Künstler*innenhaus Mousonturm* as a dramaturg and curator for the 2022 season, which has resulted in a broadening of her perspective—not only in terms of institutional structures, but also the dimension of international collaboration in particular, including both its opportunities and its challenges.





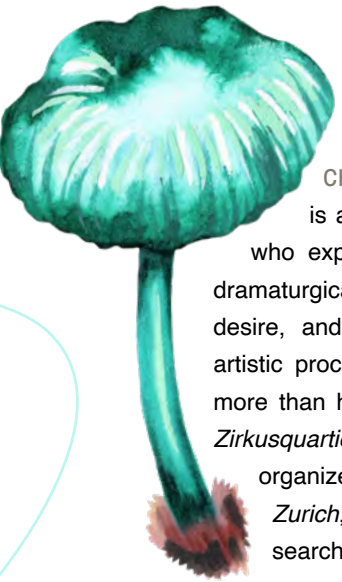
ANNE-LAURE SAHY ( SHE / HER )

works as a mediator and develops new dramaturgical approaches. She has provided dramaturgical accompaniment to choreographers, performers, directors, visual artists, and documentary filmmakers. In addition, she has worked as a project coordinator for artistic projects in prisons, and as a curator, producer, and editor. As part of the Vaud-based dance network *Association Vaudoise Danse Contemporaine (AVDC)*, she has initiated numerous projects for theatre and dance professionals, including the network for professional exchange *ddd – dramaturgie danse dialogue*, and published the anthology *Incorporer, Dramaturgies en danse contemporaine.* In her collaborations and continuing education programs, she offers contemporary, site-specific, collaborative, iterative, experimental, and embodied dramaturgical practices and processes.

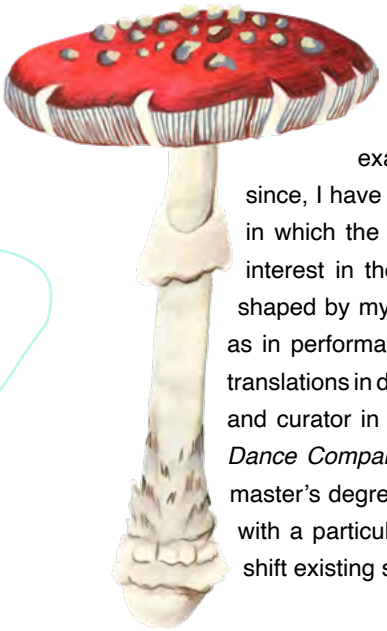


ARU RAY TORMANN ( THEY / THEM )

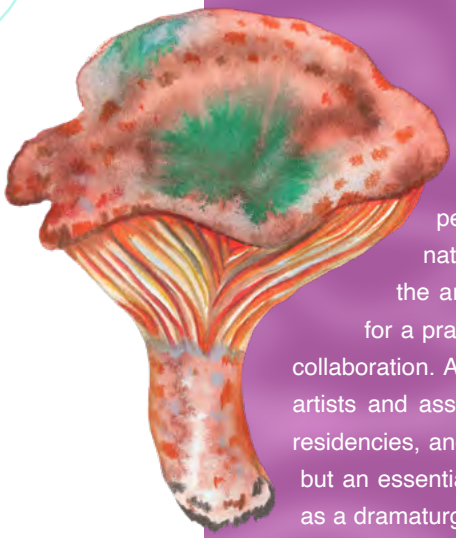
works in dance dramaturgy, curation, and dramaturgy. Educated in political philosophy and the performing arts, Aru's practice is situated at the intersection of artistic and theoretical research. They are particularly interested in participatory processes and in the question of how art in public spaces can stimulate dialogue between bodies, landscapes, and stories as well as the political dimensions of space and community. In their artistic and organizational practice, Aru prioritizes care and works towards sustainable structures and methods in the performing arts. Aru lives in Berlin. They do most of their work there and frequently elsewhere.



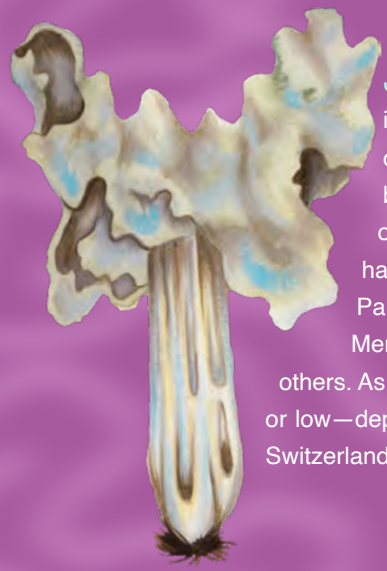
**CHARLOTTE MATHIESSEN** ( SHE / HER )
is a dramaturg, choreographer, and performer who explores the interweaving of feminist praxis, dramaturgical thinking, and artistic work. Curiosity, desire, and fury are the driving forces behind her artistic processes. Charlotte is a hybrid. She spends more than half her time working as co-director of *the Zirkusquartier Zürich*; she creates choreographic works, organizes on behalf of *the Feminist Strike Collective Zurich*, dances in projects, researches, embraces, searches, reads, swims, sleeps…



**LISA LEOPOLD** ( SHE / HER )
Dance had long been a desire of mine until I found the courage to make it part of my reality, at nearly the exact same time as I discovered my love of literature. Ever since, I have been fascinated by the stage as a space of possibility in which the body and the imagination enkindle new realities. My interest in the interfolding of theory and practice continues to be shaped by my education in theatre, film, and media studies as well as in performance studies, alongside a research project on cultural translations in dance. After a period of working as a freelance dramaturg and curator in Hamburg and Berlin, I am currently working with the *Dance Company St. Gallen* and broadening my horizons through a master's degree in *Sustainability, Technology, and Entrepreneurship*, with a particular interest in how artistic practice can challenge and shift existing structures.



**JESSICA HUBER** ( SHE / HER )
Jessica's artistic practice glides between different worlds of performance: while her early works were primarily choreographic in nature, her current productions vary in form and character. What unites the artist's various works, however, are forms of connection, the search for a practice and aesthetic of sharing and exchange, and a lived desire for collaboration. Accordingly, Jessica Huber has turned her collaborations with other artists and associates into her primary working method: formats such as walks, residencies, and workshops are, for her, not only inspiring moments of interaction, but an essential part of the creative process. Jessica works both as an artist and as a dramaturg with curiosity and care, creating "spaces" in which different voices, bodies, and stories can coexist and/or co-create alongside one another.



**JOHANNA HILARI** ( SHE / HER, ELLA)
is a privileged migrant. Before starting her degree, she considered entering a carpentry apprenticeship and becoming a set designer. As she was nearing the end of her doctoral studies, she kept asking herself why she hadn't taken that path. She has not yet collaborated with Paloma Ardeti, Paola Bascón, Ibelisse Guardia, Sharon Mercado, Amanda Romero, Miguel Valdivieso, as well as others. As a jury member, she is constantly amazed at how high or low—depending on the comparison—the cultural subsidies in Switzerland are. Johanna has now spent half her life in Europe.





**LYN BENTSCHIK** ( THEY / THEM )
works as a choreographer, performer, and dramaturg. Following an exhausting BA in *Contemporary Dance and Performance at Stockholm University of the Arts*, they went on to complete an even more exhausting MA in *Dance (Choreography) at Zurich University of the Arts*. Consequently, their training in dramaturgy is informal, non-professional and not associated with any higher education institution, and occurred somewhere between learning by doing and observing dramaturgs, whom Lyn tries to afford to hire for their own artistic projects. Their resultant works are situated somewhere at the intersections of dance, expanded choreography, performance, and visual art.



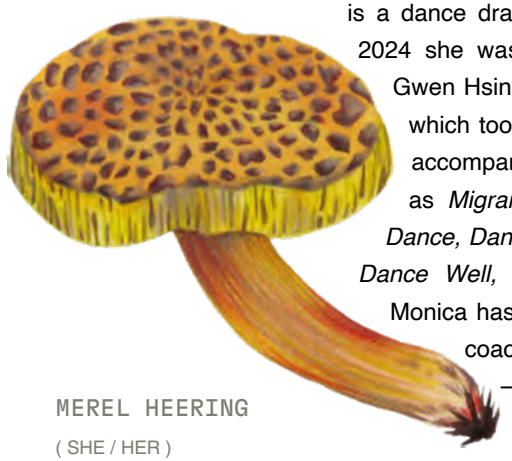
**MARIE ALEXIS** ( SHE / HER )
Every project unfolds its own logic and voice. Marie Alexis's task is to listen. As a choreographer and dance dramaturg, she keeps the original vision in mind as the process unfolds and asks: What is this piece striving for? What impact should it unfold on the world? Born in the year of the advent of *MTV* and the first *IBM* computer in France, she moved to Zurich just in time to see the turn of the millennium—the computers survived, she stayed. With the *compagnie O.*, she develops formats in which neurodiversity becomes visible as an artistic force and a social mission. For those who are fond of numbers: *MA in Dance/Choreography 2020, Zurich University of the Arts. Recipient of the 2021 Award for Special Cultural Merit by the City of Zurich.*



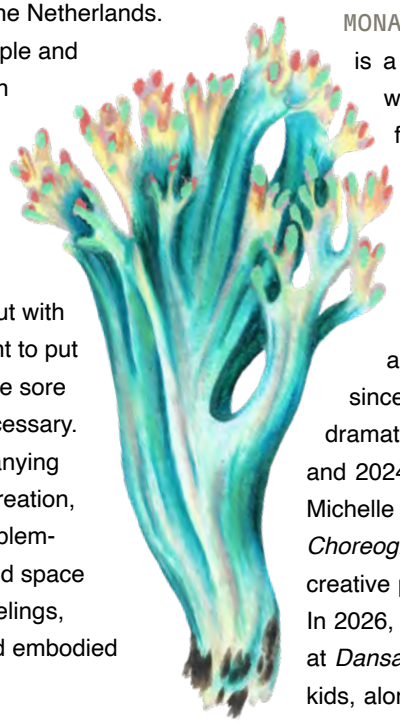




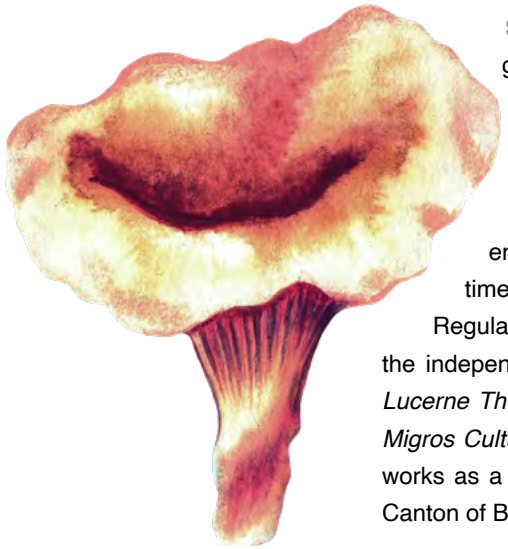
**MONICA GILLETTE** ( SHE / HER )
is a dance dramaturg and former professional dancer. In 2024 she was appointed co-artistic director, along with Gwen Hsin-Yi Chang, of Germany's first *Tanztriennale*, which took place in Hamburg in June 2026. She has accompanied several European funded projects, such as *Migrant Bodies – Moving Borders, Empowering Dance, Dancing Museums – The Democracy of Beings, Dance Well, and Aerowaves' Moving Borders Project*. Monica has also been a dramaturg and transformation coach at *Tanzhaus Zürich* and researcher for *EDN – European Dance Development Network*, resulting in the 2024 publication, *Practices of Care and Wellbeing in Contemporary Dance: Evidence from the Field.*



**MEREL HEERING**
( SHE / HER )
is a dance dramaturge, facilitator and alignment coach based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. "I support people and organizations in aligning vision and actions, body and mind. I do so from a place of compassion, but with the commitment to put my finger on the sore spot, when necessary. I love accompanying processes of creation, change, or problem-solving and hold space for curiosity, feelings, complexity, and embodied learning."

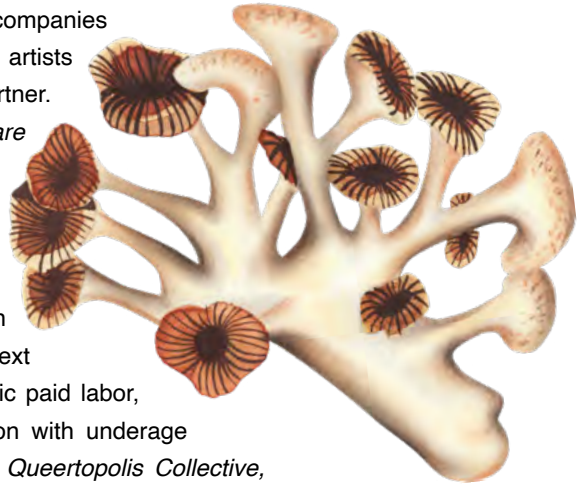


**MONA DE WEERDT** ( SHE / HER )
is a scholar of theater and dance as well as a dramaturg. She comes from a working-class family and was the first person in her family to graduate from university. She feels the exhaustion of this "upward mobility" as part of her daily reality. Mona has been the artistic director of *TanzPlan Ost* since 2021 and works as a freelance dramaturg on the side. Between 2021 and 2024, she collaborated with filmmaker Michelle Ettlin on the documentary series *Choreographers at Work!*, which explores creative processes in contemporary dance. In 2026, Mona was dramaturg-in-residence at *Dansateliers Rotterdam*. As she has two kids, alongside her artistic (paid) work, she engages in unpaid care work.



SELINA BEGHETTO ( SHE / HER )
grew up near the source of the Inn and studied along the Danube, the Arno, and the Aare. Lives near the banks of the Rhine in Basel. Moves between dance, theater, writing, and Trikonasana. Writes in Romansh and German, engenders culture, and spends about as much time on the yoga mat as on rehearsal stages. Regularly switches between the state theater and the independent scene, and vice versa. After stints at *the Lucerne Theater, Konzert und Theater St. Gallen*, and t*he Migros Culture Percentage Dance Festival Steps*, she now works as a performing arts and literature specialist for the Canton of Basel-Stadt and is raising a child.

VALERIE WEHRENS ( NO PRONOUNS, THEY / THEM )
is a dance dramaturg and accompanies choreographers and performance artists as a critical-creative dialogue partner. Valerie co-hosts the *TakeMoreCare* platform for artistic reflection and exchange, and explores in their own writing projects *(WORDSCAPES, assembly of ghosts)* performative settings in which dramaturgical thinking and text intersect. In addition to their artistic paid labor, Valerie works in a social institution with underage refugees and is organized in the *Queertopolis Collective, an Awareness Collective*, as well as the *Queer Lapdance Collective.*







# Imprint

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**Mona De Weerdt, Valerie Wehrens, Rommy González**
***Wandering Dramaturgies***
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**Note on Spelling & Punctuation:** The texts follow US-American English spelling and punctuation.

