

Through The Hourglass: New Play Development at
Tarragon and Nightswimming

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Abstract

This study proposes and tests a model for play development analysis, which offers a framework and a vocabulary for cataloguing the working parts of play development initiatives. When scholars analyze a completed play text, there are several useful categories available with which to organize observations, including space and time, character, dialogue, plot and story, genre, and spectacle. Such basic categories have been lacking in the analysis of play development and dramaturgy practice. In order to create a framework for analysis, the hourglass model for play development analysis proposes the basic categories of *source, perspective, leadership, company modelling, choice of form, conditions of creation (including assumed theatrical conventions), design, given and anticipated consequences, and reception.*

The three case studies included in this project demonstrate the uses and limitations of the analysis model for new play development and its categories. The *Whispering Pines* play development process at Nightswimming and the processes experienced by the participants in the 2011 Tarragon Playwright's Unit both fit easily into the hourglass, largely because they employ traditional roles in the play development process without challenging established hierarchies and because both resulted in play texts; Nightswimming's *Rough House*, as a devised piece, challenges the model and demonstrates its flexibility in dealing with non-traditional forms of theatre-making. By providing grounds for comparison between these three markedly different models, the hourglass teases out a number of productive contrasts between text-based and devised theatre.

The model which I propose and test in this study has been designed to introduce a formal, pragmatic methodology to the heretofore anecdotal field of scholarship on English-Canadian dramaturgy and new play development. Its formation is indebted to and embedded within the scholarship which has come before. The pragmatic model is proposed as a methodological

framework for analysis that has yet to be employed in scholarship on dramaturgy practice and new play development in particular. In my analysis of three play development initiatives, I identify the common elements inherent in each development setting and, by using the same methodology to understand each process I uncover the formative elements unique to each process. The uniquely structured analysis contributes to existing scholarship by illustrating how new play development serves or does not serve the playwright, how the relationship between dramaturg and writer affect the process, and to what extent the realities of each development model in question do or do not serve the needs of each project. The thorough analysis afforded by the model tests the three tenets of play development identified by scholarship on development dramaturgy and illuminates the inner workings of the development initiatives which are particular to each case study.

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Introduction

Canada fosters new play development in many ways, ranging from the one-on-one dramaturgical feedback at membership-based development institutions like Playwrights Theatre Centre in Vancouver and Playwrights Workshop Montreal to retreats at the Banff Playwrights Colony to staged readings and new play festivals at Toronto's 'alternative' theatres founded during a wave of cultural nationalism which swept Canada in the nineteen seventies. Within these contexts, dramaturgy practice is a flexible and somewhat amorphous concept that describes the process of supporting the development of a play. To date, the process of dramaturgy, in its English-Canadian context, has been the subject of predominantly anecdotal rather than analytical studies, largely consisting of narratives about what happened when and to whom. This thesis seeks to provide the missing analytical component in existing scholarship on new-play development in English-speaking Canada by applying a consistent methodological framework to three case studies, representing three approaches to new play development: Brian Quirt's development and production dramaturgy for Richard Sanger's *Whispering Pines*, which premiered at the GCTC in 2011; the 2011 Tarragon Playwrights Unit, a well-established program which brings playwrights together to draft and redraft their scripts over the course of eleven months; and, finally, Nightswimming's development dramaturgy for *Rough House*, a devised work that resulted in a series of performances, but not a play text as such. While it is not possible to argue that any play development process is representative of, or typical in, English-speaking Canada, much less Canada as a whole since francophone practices are influenced by an entirely different cultural and historical context, these three case studies do illustrate a range of possible approaches to new-play development, allowing me to demonstrate how the analytical framework that I have devised illuminates three very different processes.

In order to analyze rather than simply describe these processes, I have developed a model which identifies the key mechanisms at work in new play development in Canada. My analytical framework is inspired by Patrice Pavis's hourglass, which he employs in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992) to explain how a cultural product is translated from one culture to another in preparation for performance. Pavis's hourglass has not been universally adored or immune to criticism, certainly, and other ways of understanding intercultural theatre have challenged its rather instrumentalist model, but it has been of enormous and indisputable value to that branch of theatre studies.¹ The systematic analysis in the field of intercultural studies that Pavis's hourglass enabled is precisely what is currently lacking in the study of new play development in Canada.

An Hourglass Model for New-Play Development

In *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Patrice Pavis builds a theory of cultural translation using the metaphor of an hourglass. In his model, the hourglass represents a process whereby the "source culture" is shaped by a multitude of filters on its way to reception within the "target culture": cultural and artistic modeling, the perspective of the adapters, the actors, the audience, the choice of the theatrical form, and sociological, anthropological and cultural modeling each filter the "source culture," reshaping it into a performance suitable for the "target culture" (Pavis, *Theatre* 4-20). The point of the rehearsal and adaptation process described by Pavis's hourglass is to perceive and prepare foreign material for reception within a separate target culture, a process which is overseen by the director. Pavis's hourglass model, while focused on cross-cultural performance, offers a

¹ For a summary of the influence and reception of Pavis's model in the intercultural debate, see Barry Freedman 69-71 and 89; for specific criticisms of Pavis's model see Bharucha 244, Lo and Gilbert 41-6, and Ruru and Pitches *passim*.

useful metaphor with which to consider any instance of theatrical translation from source text, idea, or ritual to performance-ready text or performance text.

Pavis's seminal work in intercultural theatre, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, in which he describes and applies his hourglass model sparked a frenzied debate in the 1990's. Scholar's who took issue with Pavis's hourglass were concerned with the one-directional flow of information which his hourglass represents. An extension of the "uni-directional" flow of information is the false binary it perpetuates, a binary which Ric Knowles calls "the West and the rest," and one which, he correctly points out, is present even in Pavis's follow up volume to *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, a collection of essays called *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, which divides scholar's contributions based on whether they position themselves from the occident or the orient (25-60). This binary is perpetuated in much of the scholarship that follows, although in "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis," Gilbert and Lo imagine a model which allows the cultural flow of information to go in two ways. Ric Knowles identifies Pavis's "focus on the responsibility of the western artist to control the circumstances of the (intercultural) exchange" as the central problem Pavis's his work, which also praises artist Peter Brook for essentially "distorting" sacred Hindu text (25), an act which critics of Brook and Pavis, such as Rustom Bharucha, admonish. Now, theatre is being made from multiple perspectives and being performed for audiences who are noting like the monolithic "target culture" which Pavis imagines in his work. According to Ric Knowles, "What is needed now [...] is a model of scholarly praxis that is humble before the dizzying multiplicities of its objects of study, that is cognisant of the researcher's own positioning and the process of scholarship as itself necessarily intercultural performance, and that does its homework in terms of attempting to understand cultural and performance forms in situ"(61). Likewise, Una Chaudhuri calls for the

subversion of the “conventional view that the theatre generated in a given country is an expression of its culture” and for “another model in which the very notion of source and target is invalidated” (282 qtd in Knowles).

Like Pavis’s model, the hourglass model for new play development also began with what Gilbert and Lo would consider an imperialistic and product oriented artistic process as its subject. The model was developed in reference to the first two case studies, which follow traditional modes of theatre wherein a script is taken up for criticisms and interpretations by ‘experts’ who interpret it for the consumption of an established audience. Moreover, the physical notion of an hourglass does imagine a one-way flow of information. It envisions a project which builds from *source* to *output*. Case study three was chosen for inclusion in the study as a way of challenging the confines of the model: could it withstand a process which does not emulate a downward progression toward a final product? Chapter three reveals the bolts holding the hourglass together are loosened as the model swells to accommodate devised work. Nonetheless, the taxonomy afforded the study of a dramaturgy workshop by the hourglass model has given this study a structure which has considerable value.

Moreover, this thesis does not propose to engage with theories of intercultural performance, nor does it propose to draw parallels with the intercultural performance debate that has risen in response to Pavis over the twenty years since his publication. I have simply borrowed the concept of the hourglass from which I have built my own theoretical framework and methodology. My filters arise not from those found in Pavis, but from the commonest practices of play development in English speaking Canada today.

The play development analysis hourglass can be viewed in figure 1 in the appendix of this document. Figure 1 labels the hourglass filters, and includes possibly variations among

the categories. For example, the *Leadership* filter contains the sub-headings of Director modelling and perspective and/or Producer modelling and perspective and/or dramaturg modelling/ perspective. *Leadership* is labeled differently in each play development workshop depending on who fills the leadership role in a given workshop. Figures 2, 3, and 4 in the appendix correlate to case studies 1, 2, and 3, respectively. These figures provide a visual comparison to Figure 1: the name the filters as represented in the respective workshops: in workshop one, *Leadership* was represented by Brian Quirt, who took a dual role as director and dramaturg; in workshop two, *Leadership* alternated between Richard Rose as produce and Andrea Romaldi as dramaturg. The figures will not be directly referenced in the chapters, but are meant as a referencing point for readers who appreciate visual representation of the methodology.

This study analyses the dramaturgical workshop process whereby a “source,” in the form of a textual draft of a play written in solitude or a concept for performance conceived in solitude, is prepared by a variety of forces for a staged reading or a performance. The “source” material is shaped and re-shaped as it passes through different editorial perspectives before it emerges into a production or reading which is then received by an audience. As in an hourglass, the source material filters through to be reformed at the bottom of the funnel into a new yet recognizably similar result. Each of the hourglass filters (*actor modelling, design, choice of form, given and anticipated consequences*) carry with them traditions, formulas and habits of work which must be carefully considered because they make measureable imprints on the process of play development and its *output*.

Filter Definitions

Each play development workshop begins with a *source*. The *source* can be expressed in an articulation of an idea for performance or in an early draft of a play-text; the *source* material is proposed or initiated by the creator; in this study, the creator is always a playwright or a performer who generates his own material. The *source* material which enters the development process can take many different shapes: in the Tarragon Playwrights Unit, the playwrights were expected to enter the unit with a full draft of a play, and those who did not had a more difficult time in the feedback portion of the workshop activities.

Contrastingly, the *Rough House* process began with only a verbally expressed idea for performance as its *source*. The *source* contains within it the *creator's perspective* which leads to *creator modelling*, an aspect of play development that is expressed by the creator's input during the workshop phase of development.

The *leadership* filter can be represented by the *director, producer, or dramaturg's* modelling and perspective: in the *Whispering Pines* case study, leader Brian Quirt was both dramaturg and director; at the Tarragon, some workshop meetings were chaired by artistic director Richard Rose, others by literary manager Andrea Romaldi. The case studies will examine how variations in leadership roles affect the creators and the process. In every case, the leader is responsible for coordinating and facilitating the day to day activities in the workshop, and is often responsible for determining the work's readiness for presentation.

The *company* affords the model additional shaping mechanisms, including *actor modelling* and *perspective*. They factor into the way characters and action will develop in performance and in the text. Performances and performance drafts of dramatic texts are often modified to suit workshop actors because the workshop actor gives the imagined character its first life. For example, in the second *Whispering Pines* workshop Quirt and lead actor Paul

Rainville discussed how to portray the character Bruno's history as a famous singer. Because Rainville could play guitar, they experimented with the idea of him carrying the instrument around onstage and strumming the strings as he delivered lines in key places. This feature of the actor, who is also a musician, became an important aspect of the character in performance. Feedback and participation from these workshop actors can also influence the choices of directors and creators during the development process. For example, in response to the private reading of *Aftershock* at the Tarragon, one of the workshop actors told playwright Evan Tsitsias that "she loved the TV references and wanted more. So, because of that one comment I actually really started to do that with the play. I looked at their language and the kind of things they said to each other based on the shows that they watched." He reports that he "found the actor feedback very helpful" (Personal interview). Actor feedback is the most common source of company input during a workshop.

A select number of workshops will also include a designer, and every reading includes the *design* of the stage space, regardless of whether the role of designer has been designated in the workshop. *Design* is present in each of the three case studies, although not all of the case studies included a performance with a fully-conceived design concept. As will be discussed in chapter two, the *design* of the public reading signified the work-in-progress conventions of the reading to the audience. As emerges in chapter three, the *design* element of the devising workshop improvisation is so formative that the designer must be acknowledged as a co-creator of the artistic output. If a designer is present in the workshop, *design* can be a human influence in the workshop, as was the case in *Rough House*. At the Tarragon, no designers were present, but the *design* of the public reading still had an impact on audience *reception* because the space was arranged to express the unfinished nature of the presentation.

The *company* and sometimes the *design* encompass the human individuals present in the workshop, but there are non-anthropomorphic shaping mechanisms at play in the hourglass as well; these include *choice of form*, *conditions of creation*, *assumed theatrical conventions*, and *given and anticipated consequence*. The *choice of form* can encompass the genre, style, aesthetics and even the cast size of the work being developed. Each *form* has its own conventions and so the choice to participate in a given tradition in forming a new work influences the perspective of the workshop participants and the features of the *output*. For example, the *form* of *Rough House* was based on silent film comedy. The principles of silent film also governed the principles of performance and influenced the construction of narrative in the workshop, as the case study of *Rough House* will demonstrate. The filter I have called *conditions of creation* describes the *assumed theatrical conventions* inherent in the workshop, which can be determined by the institution or the participants, the available and included research, and the workshop space, time, environment and activities. *Assumed theatrical conventions* are similar to *the choice of form*, in that they are expressed by adherence to norms in presentation or practice. However, *assumed theatrical conventions* can arise from the conventions of the workshop or institution, or from the training and experience of the participants and not the *choice of form* expressed by the art being created. In the development of *Whispering Pines*, the conventions of the workshop highlighted the centrality of the text; the training of the actors, along with the assumptions of the director, invited psychological realism as an acting style, although the *choice of form* could have supported alternative approaches. In contrast, the *Rough House* process was characterized by *assumed theatrical conventions* associated with devising, methods of improvisation, and play. Although play development initiatives offer very similar working conditions and

resources on the surface, the specificities of each process have proved to be crucial in the shaping of each case study's artistic *output*.

Given and anticipated consequences include every hope, desire, or wish the creator and the workshop team harbour regarding the *reception* of their work. *Given and anticipated consequences* of the reading or the performance can include the creator's hope that the work will be chosen for future production and the realisation or frustration of that hope, or even the creator or leader's hopes that a joke will be funny, and the subsequent corroboration or dismissal by an audience. Every hope or assumption which is held by the collaborators in a development workshop colours the work that they do, and the realization of the consequences factors into the *reception* of the play. For example, when Tarragon Playwrights Unit writers take suggestions on events in their play-texts from Richard Rose, their acquiescence to his suggestions can be linked to their desire to have their work produced. An offer of production would be a positive example of a *given consequence* of the process. The *reception* filter includes the reception of preliminary and unofficial audiences, including the responses of those who may visit a workshop to observe, the audience response at a staged reading or performance, and written criticism. The *reception* and the *given consequences* are two sides of the same coin.

The artistic *output* can be described as all of the consequences of the development process: the final text, the staged reading or performance, recordings of the performance, and the given (but not anticipated) consequences. *Output* describes everything that could become *source* in the next process: if we were to turn the hourglass upside down, the *output* script would become a starting point for a next production, the *output* production the precedent for all future productions, and the criticism part of *the conditions of creation* and possibly also the included research of future productions.

The model is particularly useful in determining which filters are the most formative in the modelling of each project. In each of the three case studies, some hourglass filters will rise to the fore in the process analysis and in the visible impact they have on the *output*. As shown in the case study of Tarragon Playwrights Unit, *the conditions of creation*, and specifically the work of peer playwrights, shaped the production drafts in astounding ways. In the case study of Nightswimming Theatre's *Rough House*, which considered a devised creation process, the *design* filter proved paramount, although design had far less impact on the other two text-centred processes.

The play development hourglass is proposed here as a way to identify and analyze the interactions of the elements involved in the advancement of a *source* into an artistic *output* during a new play development workshop. The hourglass of this study proposes a framework which will structure an analysis of the trajectory from a *source* impulse to an artistic *output*. The filtering categories in the hourglass illuminate the inner workings of the development process, showing both how and why choices are made and how they are received. The need for a structured analytical model, one that is flexible and adaptable enough to include all varieties of play development in English-speaking Canada, but also sufficiently systematic to create meaningful comparisons between these varieties, becomes clear when the body of existing scholarship in this field is surveyed.

Existing Scholarship: Context for a New Methodology

Modern definitions of dramaturgy practice find it intimately bound with new play creation.² In her introduction to *Between the Lines: The Process of Dramaturgy*, Judith Rudakoff states that “In Canada, dramaturgy is synonymous with new play development” (3). Additional literature supports the idea that dramaturgy and new play development are closely linked and that the primary function of the dramaturg is often a developmental one. However, new play development is not restricted solely to dramaturgical support. When new play development is realized in the form of a workshop (as opposed to a solicited script analysis, for example) there is a multitude of factors inherent in that process for which the hourglass structure that I have developed was built to account. The dramaturgical element, as expressed by the hourglass in the filter *leadership perspective*, is only one of many important forces at play in a workshop which existing scholarship mentions but does not seriously consider because its primary focus has been to explain and justify the role of dramaturg in the theatre and to theorize the dramaturgical sensibility³. Existing scholarship on new play development has not yet offered a systematic analysis of each contributing factor present in play development settings. However, a survey of the scholarship on the topic reveals three tenets of play development which lay the foundation of this study: new play development serves the playwright, is characterized by the collaboration between writer and dramaturg, and is defined contextually according to the needs of each project.

The idea that institutional play development services exist to serve the playwright and not only the play (and indeed, the question of whether they are designed to serve the play at

² See Proel “Preface” ix, Barton “Introduction” v-vi, Rudakoff and Thomson 3, Turner and Behrntd 121, Hansen 170.

³ Proehl *Toward*, Borreca (in “Dramaturging”) Crum *passim*, and Katz (in “Compleat”) each discuss this at length.

all) is found in almost all literature on play development, an assumption that is called into question by the hourglass analysis. According to Peter Hinton, the dramaturg's "objective is to assist the playwright in making the play the truest and best and fullest that it can be" (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thomson 115). Another Canadian dramaturg, Urjo Kareda, articulated a more sweeping objective: for him, the success of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit was measured by "the number of people who have a clearer sense of themselves as writers. It's about self-knowledge," and Kareda felt that the "reward usually comes as part of a long relationship with a writer" (qtd. in Rudakoff and Thomson 15-29). His belief was supported by the burgeoning careers of many now-established Canadian playwrights with whom he sustained famous mentorships, including Judith Thompson, Joan MacLeod, Don Hannah, Michael Healey and Morwyn Brebner. Bill Glassco, also of the Tarragon Theatre, told Rudakoff that "I wanted to develop the writers" (156). Like Kareda and his entourage, Glassco developed a famous mentorship with playwright David French. Both of these dramaturgs participated in the new wave of Canadian writing, which began in the 1970s, as mentors and curators of the contemporary Canadian dramatic canon.

The hourglass model identifies in the objective of 'writer development' the inevitability that the writer will be developed in a certain way, in line with the aesthetics, interests, and limitations of the institution. The hourglass filters which I have labelled *conditions of creation* and *assumed theatrical conventions* were created in order to account for the considerations of the institution in the expressly altruistic pursuit of writer development as it pertains to the process and the articulation of the *output*.

Most accounts of new play dramaturgy acknowledge that there is a level of partnership inherent in that collaboration between writer and dramaturg; the dramaturg's role is described along a spectrum from dramaturg as 'sounding board' to dramaturg as 'editor' of

the writer's work. The idea of collaboration is reflected institutionally in some play development settings, like the Banff playwrights' retreat where writers work with their own 'buddy' dramaturg and the whole process is overseen by a dramaturg in residence. Other partnerships, such as the historic Tarragon partnerships between Bill Glassco and David French or Urjo Kareta and Judith Thompson, form when a member of theatre institution takes a writer under his or her wing and makes a commitment to produce his or her work. As Rudakoff suggests, writers sometimes accept dramaturgical input unquestioningly when a partnership leads to production (34-5). Hence, the premise of collaboration can undermine the premise of new play development as 'writer support.' Literature on new play development is aware of this problem and it has a nickname for the dramaturg who usurps a writer's creative licence, the dreaded "play doctor" (Rudakoff 121). Inherent in the role of the play doctor is the assumption by dramaturgs that they "know more about structure, editing, or the dramatic text," an attitude which is often found, especially since many development dramaturgs are also educators (La Bonté qtd in Rudakoff 33). Towing the line between pedagogy and creativity is one of the challenges of play development in any setting.

The ideal dramaturg in existing scholarship is described as the script doctor's angelic twin, the "facilitator." The facilitator opens doors to possibilities by asking thoughtful questions. He or she is a 'sounding board' for the writer's ideas, knowing all the while that "the real creative work will always be what the writer does with the results of that dramaturgical process" (Rudakoff 123). In this study, the hourglass shows that regardless of the style of dramaturgy—be the dramaturg an editor or a sounding board—the key to a successful working partnership between dramaturg and primary creator is a shared *perspective*. While this idea is touched on in the existing scholarship, this thesis dissects the inner workings of two opposite processes in chapters one and three, the latter of which is

hinged on shared perspective, while the comparative failure of the former may be attributed to divergent perspectives of creator and dramaturg/director.

The final, and most tenuous, premise of new play development supported by current literature on the subject is the assertion that developmental dramaturgy is defined contextually by the project. In his introduction to *Developing Nation*, Bruce Barton states that

Throughout this collection, dramaturgy resists the mantle of stable definitions and instead insists on perpetually redefining itself in relationship to its context: the people, project, and parameters it operates upon and within. Yet [...] this wary elusiveness concerning definitions in no way precludes concrete description and analysis of its “working parts.” (v)

Barton’s collection is brimming with lively and thoughtful descriptions of play development by leading practitioners. However, in stating that all analysis is contextual and that definitions change with the parameters of each project, the collection evades comparison between processes.

Rudakoff and Thomson’s book *Between the Lines: The Process of Dramaturgy* gathers similar testimony from leading practitioners in an edited collection of conversations aiming to “demystify the process [of dramaturgy], and separate the mythologies from what actually happens, which is all over the map” (iii). However, the composition of their project makes the achievement of this goal impossible because observations about each contributor’s own practice are bound up with their ideas about what should ideally exist. Their observations are certainly useful as a starting point, but they do not get to the crux of *how* the creative process yields text and/or performance.

The hourglass model which I propose and test in this study has been designed to introduce a formal, pragmatic methodology to the heretofore anecdotal field of scholarship on dramaturgy and new play development. Its formation is indebted to and embedded within the scholarship which has come before. The pragmatic model is proposed as a methodological framework for analysis that has yet to be employed in scholarship on dramaturgy practice and new play development in particular. In sending three different methods of play development through the hourglass, I identify the common elements inherent in each development setting, and by using the same methodology to understand each process I uncover the formative elements unique to each process. The hourglass analysis contributes to existing scholarship by illustrating how new play development serves or does not serve the playwright, how the relationship between dramaturg and writer affects the process, and to what extent the realities of each development model in question do or do not serve the needs of each project. The thorough analysis afforded by the hourglass model tests the three tenets of play development identified by scholarship on development dramaturgy and illuminates the inner workings of the development models which are particular to each case study. These models, in turn, are embedded within the history of English-Canadian theatre's evolution from the co-existence of amateur and professional (but largely foreign) theatre practice to the advent of publicly-funded professional theatres and development centers which typify theatre practice in Canada today.

Play Development in English-speaking Canada: A Concise History

In 1951, Vincent Massey tabled the report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences. The Massey Report, as it has become known, called for federal support of the arts as a tool for nation-building and national unity.

The report represents the first official support for playwrights and play development in Canada, and it ushered in an era of theatrical nationalism with federal funding to support Canadian drama in the formation of the Canada Council. Regional theatres were built across Canada in the following decade, but their imported repertoire and international artistic directors did little to satiate those with an appetite for an indigenous professional drama. The desire for Canadian-made drama was strongest in the centennial year of 1967, when the Dominion Drama Festival for the first time stipulated Canadian connections for all productions nominated for awards and the regional theatres risked premièring Canadian work on their stages (Kennedy 185).

The first serious play development initiatives were part of the alternative theatre movement that grew in opposition to the regional theatre, which was “in theory (but less so in practice) a theatre for the Canadian actor, designer, director, administrator and audience. [However], a Canadian playwright [...] seemed in most cases to be left out of the equation” (Duchesne 144). At this time no workshop or play development program was in place at the regional theatres, a wrong which the “alternative” theatres righted with their mandates that made original Canadian work their *raison d’etre* (Duchesne 144). The new funding initiatives afforded by the Canada Council as well as the Local Initiative Program allowed small “alternative” theatres, such as Tarragon, to flourish. They put in place a network of spaces where indigenous drama became priority programming, a situation that ran parallel to the availability of arts funding from the public purse.

In tandem with the theatre-producing alternatives, playwright development centres across Canada were founded by citizens concerned with the welfare of the English-language Canadian drama. The first of the centres, Playwrights Workshop Montreal (PWM), began as a satellite of the Dominion Drama Festival in 1963, when it was largely volunteer run and

associated with the amateur theater. In 1975, Bob White was hired as the first Artistic Director Dramaturg and their current mandate and structure were developed (“Playwrights Workshop”). Play development initiatives were initiated across the country in the decade following Canada’s centennial year: PWM was followed by Playwrights Theatre Centre (PTC), founded as the New Play Centre in Vancouver by Sheila Neville and Douglas Bankson in 1970; in 1972 the Playwrights Guild of Canada was established; 1973 saw the first instalment of the Banff Playwrights colony retreat; the Manitoba Theatre Centre formed in 1979; the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre followed suit in 1982; Alberta Playwrights Network was incorporated in 1985, although a playwrights group predates their incorporation (Leung); the Atlantic region was finally served with the inauguration of Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre in 1991. In 1995, Brian Quirt and founding producer Naomi Campbell conceptualized Nightswimming Theatre, a play development company unlike the others because it does not operate on a membership basis and, although it does not produce a regular season, it does commit to brokering production for each of the works it commissions.

Today, three levels of public funding, at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels, make the existence of these play development centres possible. Both Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council have specific grants available for development, and the Toronto Arts Council, which offers funding to not-for-profit theatre organizations, lists the “development and performance of works by Canadian writers” as its sole priority (“Theatre”). The Ontario Arts Council offers three theatre grants: two for development and one for production. These include Development Phase One grants which “contribute to the artistic costs of initial exploration and development of a theatrical project or idea [for which a] public presentation is not required,” and Development Phase Two, a grant which contributes “to the costs of a

project that is in an advanced state of development and is moving toward production.

[Recipients] must include some form of invited or public workshop presentation as part of the process” (*Ontario*). Individuals and not-for-profit theatre organizations, including the play development initiatives, are eligible to apply for these development grants which, combined, can total twenty thousand dollars. On the federal level, the Canada Council for the Arts offers operating grants to producing and non-producing theatre companies alike. Since 2004, the council has even recognized the special contextual nature of the work by changing its “operating program assessment criteria” and offering special “weighting for play development centres” in its assessments of grant proposals; this new weighting accommodates the non-producing nature of development centres, and has “their activities assessed more on the basis of the quality of their dramaturgical process” (“Operating Grants”¹¹). Despite the difficulty the Canada Council may have faced in assessing activities which may or may not yield a professional ‘product,’ development centres and the activity they call dramaturgy have become a permanent feature of the Canadian theatre scene, one that has changed the funding process to suit its activities.

One purpose of the creation of the Canada Council was to resist the complete absorption of Canadian culture by the strong cultural output south of the border. New play creation is a tangible manifestation of Canadian culture and hence of the Canada Council’s success, which explains why the council has tended to prioritize the creation of new work by Canadian artists, potentially even to the detriment of spending on (multiple) productions, tours of Canadian-content work, and advertising which would allow those works to be seen by a large national audience. Development organizations which do not actively seek production for the works they develop contribute to the inertia in Canadian theatre that Elliot Hayes describes in his essay “Stasis: The Workshop Syndrome.” This “stasis” contributes to

discontent and fierce competition for stage time in playwrighting circles. Political and economic realities have an impact on the *conditions of creation* in play development workshops, which the case study analyses will investigate.

Play development at Tarragon and Nightswimming

Nightswimming Theatre, a relatively young non-producing dramaturgical company, and Tarragon Theatre, an historic pillar of new play development in English-speaking Canada, were chosen as case studies because of their divergent mandates and business models as well as their history of fostering new Canadian work. The Tarragon Theatre offers its annual Playwrights Unit as a way to audition young writers for the company. Writers who “fit” the Tarragon model are subsequently invited into residency, where their work will go on to be developed for production. As a producing company, Tarragon typically programs classic plays from the international canon alongside Canadian classics on the main stage, while new Canadian plays première on the smaller secondary stage. Unlike Tarragon, Nightswimming does not maintain a permanent theatre space. Ironically, though, unlike Tarragon, Nightswimming does not develop works without promising the creator a production. Nightswimming’s primary activity is the commissioning and brokering of new works which are produced at various companies, usually with Brian Quirt as director. Both companies are highly regarded as contributors to the development of Canadian drama. The differences in their methods provide interesting points of contrast which the hourglass model readily illuminates.

Tarragon

The Tarragon Playwrights Unit (TPU) was chosen for inclusion in this study because of its historic commitment to developing new plays and playwrights, and because of the Tarragon Theatre's continuing success in bringing new Canadian work to the stage.

According to its mission statement, "Tarragon Theatre's mission is to create, develop and produce new plays and to provide the conditions for new work to thrive," and the TPU is the first step in fulfilling that mission. Since Richard Rose became artistic director in 2002, about a fifth of all TPU plays (21.6%) have gone on to be produced at the Tarragon, and several TPU plays have found production elsewhere. The numbers reveal the distinct possibility that joining the TPU could lead to a writer's work being picked up by the theatre.⁴

The consequently rivalrous approach to development at the early stages has been known to "get competitive in a polite Canadian way," which Rose admits "is good and bad"

(Telephone interview). For the Tarragon, the TPU is

an opportunity to explore without too much pressure [...]. There is not a guarantee that they are going to get onstage because we are using the unit as an opportunity for the writers to understand how I and Andrea work, and for us to see how the writer works, and to see if there is a simpatico relationship and ability to move the play forward or not. That [is] an aesthetic relationship we are trying to build. Of course everyone wants their play on stage so that's the true thing. (Telephone interview)

This sense of competition and of testing the waters of a producing theatre is the basis for the hourglass's *conditions of creation* in the Tarragon case study of chapter two. As that chapter

⁴ This figure is calculated based on the number of play reported as produced at the Tarragon on the TPU history webpage ("Playwrights Unit History").

will show, the dynamic described here has discernible implications for the work that results from the TPU.

In 2011, the TPU's five selected writers met with Richard Rose and Andrea Romaldi in the upstairs studio space of Tarragon Theatre four times over the course of the year in January, May, September and November. Two of those meetings included a cast of actors to read the script. Each of the five writers who participated in the TPU had one full day in each of the four weeks when his or her work would be the focus; the other playwrights were present for fellow writers' workshops. At the end of the final meeting, the theatre hosted a public reading of the developed play texts. In contrast to the Nightswimming workshops investigated in chapters one and three, the TPU is not conducted in preparation for a full-scale production, although Tarragon does provide workshop time with a full cast for new plays that are selected for production (Rose Telephone interview). Despite the lack of a full production in the TPU, the workshops embody a process typical of the majority of development initiatives in English-speaking Canada, whereby a first draft of a play (or pre-workshop source text) passes through a set of filters and is shaped into a public reading draft (or post-workshop target text).

The history and reputation of the Tarragon Theatre is a significant factor in the *conditions of creation* of the case study because many of the participants attempted to write in accordance with the theatre's style, as expressed in the discourse surrounding the theatre. Historically, the Tarragon Playwrights Unit did not necessarily facilitate the journey of a full play from one draft into another. When the Playwrights Unit was run by Tarragon's second artistic director Urjo Kareda from 1982 until his untimely passing in 2001, the unit consisted of bi-weekly meetings during which playwrights would read the scenes they were developing. The focus was on the development of the writers rather than the development of

a single play-text, and, although some writers' works did receive public readings, such a reading was considered an additional opportunity and not a feature of the process.

Additionally, in Kareda's time, the unit consisted of six writers new to Tarragon as well as the writers in residence to whom the theatre offered a financial commitment and an office in the building. According to Richard Sanger, who was a member of this early unit, it was Kareda's way of giving back to the writing community, his way of conducting a "community service" (Personal interview). However, many critics of the TPU and of the Tarragon Theatre in general believe that rather than aid in developing playwright potential, the Tarragon climate only nourished projects which fit narrowly into the realm of "poetic naturalism" and shunned creativity and social or political statements (Fraser 2, Devine 16, Knowles 130, Butt 14). The hourglass model helps to explain how the conditions within the TPU contribute to this homogenizing effect.

Brad Fraser, who began developing his play *Chainsaw Love* during the first decade of the TPU, writes frankly about his experience there:

The Tarragon experience had seemed to be more about the artistic director trying to help me write a certain kind of play- the Tarragon kind of play with one set and four characters and lots of talking and internal revelations about events that happen offstage- rather than aiding me in finding the best way to write the play I was trying to write (which involved none of those things). However, the experience also allowed me to meet and interact with such wonderfully imaginative people [...] and that made it more than worthwhile. ("Introduction" *Unidentified Human Remains* 2)

Although Fraser has stated elsewhere that he is a "great believer in the workshop as a tool in developing a new play" ("Introduction" *Martin Yesterday* 6), Kareda was clearly not the ideal dramaturg for him. As the literature survey above has suggested, the relationship

between writer and dramaturg is paramount to any kind of development program, and many of the successful Canadian plays developed in an institutional setting have been attributed to a successful relationship of this kind.

Even the successful relationships between institutional dramaturg and writer have their drawbacks. Describing her experience as a participant in the Tarragon Playwrights Unit of 1984-85, Robyn Butt identifies the “Guru-disciple dynamic” which she believes plagues institutional development initiatives such as the TPU: “all aspiring young artists [...] are vulnerable to throwing their talent at the feet of someone with Professional Power” (qtd. in Devine 14). Such a dynamic can both pollute an original voice and also leave a writer alone and disillusioned when the mentorship ends. In the collection of statements of which Butt’s is a part, Michael Devine writes that Kareda lost interest in plays that communicate their message in non-textual ways and that the process at Tarragon “confirms the narrative, character- based aesthetic already at work” (16). While Devine correctly assesses Kareda’s taste, some of those writers who fit the aesthetic did very well at the Tarragon; as Butt wrote, “those people have careers now, where before they had only hope” (14).

Judith Thompson, whose career is one of jewels in the Tarragon crown, has been consistently unabashed in her praise of Kareda and his mentorship:

Urjo had true loyalty to his writer, as long as we showed loyalty to him. We could write freely, abandoning all self-censors, knowing that unless it was just a preposterous, insulting piece of tripe, our work would get produced on the Tarragon stage. He could be there to help us pound it into shape. (“It’s My Birthday Forever Now” 116)

Thompson's career was one of Kareda's greatest accomplishments, and she continues to write prolifically even now that her guru is gone. However, now that Richard Rose has succeeded Kareda, the theatre that was once home to all of her plays is no longer open to her:

I have no relationship with the Tarragon now that Urjo is dead. Richard Rose, out of courtesy, offered me a spot in his first or second season. I wrote and directed *Capture Me*--and though he did give me dramaturgy, I feel that it was not helpful. I am proud of some of the play, but I feel it needed radical dramaturgy--I was just so devastated by Urjo's death, I think I could not judge my own work. Richard has not wanted to work with me since then, and in fact turned down *Palace of the End*. I am not bitter about this, as every [Artistic Director] must make [his or her] own unique mark, and the stable of playwrights is very much part of that legacy ("Re: Such Creatures").

The end of Thompson's association with Tarragon underscores the nature of the relationship between a playwrights' theatre and its artistic director, and between a writer and her dramaturg. In a theatre mandated to produce new work, the stable of writers is always an extension of the director's own taste and working relationships, expressed in the construction of every new season.

Both Urjo Kareda and Richard Rose made their aesthetic preferences known in statements that weigh heavily in the discourse surrounding the theatre. When asked in an interview conducted in 1983 about his selection process, Kareda answered, "I believe I shouldn't include in my season plays which I am not personally excited by [...] It's my attitude to the work that counts" (qtd. in Wallace 26-7). Although Kareda had a reputation for generosity because he famously read and responded to every play submitted to the theatre, the success of those scripts at the Tarragon was subject to his interest. Richard Rose

creates similar *conditions of creation* with a different process. He sees himself as “a solicitor, not a receiver. I will actively go out and say, ‘what’s your play? What other plays have you got in mind?’ [...] ‘If you’re ready to write that play, I’m interested in that play’” (Rose qtd. in McKinnie “Legacies” 32). In a personal interview, Rose revealed that he is looking for “content that surprises me,” “complexity, a multiple perspective, something that operates in contradiction” and “the play has to end with a question” (Telephone interview). He also expressed distaste for ideologies and any play that portrays a one-sided character. For example, a play with a horribly racist character must explore the source of that villainy. Rose believes that as he and a playwright “develop this relationship the playwright will understand that it is my ethical or aesthetic bar” (Telephone interview). Indeed, Michael Healey, who has been a writer in residence at the Tarragon Theatre since Rose became artistic director in 2002, describes his own work in precisely Rose’s terms: “I want it [his play *Proud*] to be a Shavian event where one guy stops talking, and you say, ‘That guy is absolutely right’ until another guy starts talking and you say, ‘No that guy’s absolutely right’” (qtd. in Adams). Despite the recent fissure in the relationship between Healey and the Tarragon over precisely this play, it is clear from his statement that Healey is an example of a writer with whom Rose shares a point of view and who asks questions and presents a discourse in a way with which Rose is comfortable with.

Although a cohesive vision contributes to an effective theatre season, as well as an effective theatre, scholars and critics have taken issue with the notion of personal taste at the Tarragon, past and present, arguing that it contributes to stylistically stagnant and politically neutral productions.⁵ The case study which examines the TPU considers the effect of the

⁵ See Devine *passim*, Johnston 140- 158 and Knowles *Reading The Material Theatre* 129-147.

theatre's style and the artistic director's taste and examines how and to what extent these elements affect new work in development.

Nightswimming

Nightswimming is a member of the Playwrights Development Centres of Canada network. Created thirty years after Playwrights Workshop Montreal, it is one of the youngest development centres in the network, and one of the most innovative; it is also the only one of the PDCs which does not operate on a membership system aside from the Banff Centre. In its mandate, it vows to

Give artists invaluable space in which to create, free from the pressure of most deadlines. While they're working, we act as broker, seeking out the ideal theatre company for the new work, and advocating for them to eventually produce it. We give the writer an unfettered opportunity to create and we offer producing theatres shows that they couldn't have developed themselves. ("About us")

By choosing its artists and only issuing commissions, rather than offering a broad spectrum of developmental activities as the other PDCs do, Nightswimming concentrates its efforts around a significantly smaller number of artists. Nightswimming's projects are by invitation only. They begin as commissions that are awarded to an artist to whose project Quirt feels he and the company can contribute. Along with the initial commission, and unusually in play development dramaturgy, Nightswimming offers artists a commitment to support the project until it is produced. Quirt's primary responsibility, along with maintaining a relationship with the artist and providing ongoing dramaturgical support, is to find a home for the project with a producing company: that is, he serves to some extent as the play's agent as well as its advocate. Once a partnership is achieved, the producing company usually shares the financial

burden of development by offering workshop space and money to pay the actors, as well as the funds for an eventual première. Nightswimming's business model allows the creators to develop their work in partnership with Quirt as artistic director and dramaturg, but apart from the mandate or expectations of a single producing theatre company. The only constraint on an artist partnering with Nightswimming is Quirt's personal aesthetic, which is quite broad. He works in everything from text-based theatre to dance and choral music. However, as a director he does have an identifiable affinity for bare stages and *mise en scène* which relies on the interaction between the actor and the lighting. Financially, Nightswimming relies on operating grants at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, as do most non-profit professional theatre organizations in Canada. Nightswimming has benefitted from the expanded eligibility mandates of each of these funding bodies, which, as discussed above, now include an "operating program assessment criteria weighing for play development centers" ("Operating" 11) and "artistic research and experimentation" (Ontario 3).

Nightswimming has had no trouble procuring funding with its current, non-producing status. According to Quirt, "The expenses of the company, aside from the usual overheads (office, supplies), are primarily people: our own small staff, and the artists contracted for our workshop processes" ("Re: Question"). He also notes that many of the company's commissions have been funded by the Laidlaw foundation, a Toronto-based, art-focused, private charity. Nightswimming Theatre Company is currently comprised of artistic director Brian Quirt, producer Rupal Shah, and dramaturgy intern Leora Morris (whose salary is funded courtesy of the Metcalf Foundation, another Toronto-based private charity). From 2003 until 2005, when they were creating *Rough House*, the subject of the third case study, permanent staff included Quirt and founding producer Naomi Campbell. In Quirt's words:

Our policy has been to insist that dance and music are part of our 'mandate' and that exploring process is also central to the company's vision. That has enabled us to work on whatever we want to, while still maintaining (and in fact increasing) the level of our operating grants. The issue is where we spend the funding more than the source. (“Re: Question”)

By expanding their mandate to include the full gamut of projects they could conceive of being involved in, Nightswimming has lessened the restrictions on their scope. Because they do not typically produce their works and their mandate favours development, they are able to spend funds on process rather than production.

Nightswimming engages in only one activity aside from its commissions. Its program, called Pure Research, is unlike any program offered at other playwright development centres of Canada. Pure Research gives theatre artists the opportunity to pursue a question about theatre practice that is not specifically linked to a particular performance, but that could be answered using a workshop. In 2010, Nightswimming commissioned three workshops: a lighting workshop that explored additive colour theory in order to determine whether anything is lost in using modern gel filters, an acting workshop which explored the portrayal of extreme pain using the paintings of Francis Bacon, and a workshop exploring the ethics of verbatim theatre. While elements of these workshops occasionally grow into ideas for performance, the goal of Pure Research is to offer time and space for discovery outside of a production context. Lighting designer and long-time Nightswimming collaborator Rebecca Picherack believes that Pure Research is proof of Quirt’s interest in technical design “as a kind of dramaturgy” (Telephone interview). By mandating technical exploration as an activity of the company, Nightswimming proves its commitment to modes of creation beyond the text.

The two Nightswimming processes which have been chosen for inclusion in this study are *Whispering Pines* by Richard Sanger and *Rough House* created and performed by Andy Massingham. They were chosen because they represent the stylistic range of the company, from traditional literary development to movement-based performance text. Chapter one explores *Whispering Pines* which was commissioned by Nightswimming in 2000. Subsequently, Alberta Theatre Projects gave it a staged reading in 2006 as part of their platform play series, and The Great Canadian Theatre Company (GCTC) agreed to workshop and produce the play in 2011. Its journey from inception to production was protracted, in contrast to *Rough House* which completed the journey in half that time. The pitfalls of *Whispering Pines*' long development process are explored in chapter one. On the other hand, since Nightswimming finds a producing company to fit the project (rather than a project to fit the company), its artists are, in principle, free to explore the limits of their idea, rather than constrained artistically by the limits of a particular company's mandate and resources.

Chapter three explores the process that generated the widely successful and Dora Award-winning physical theatre production *Rough House*. The process behind *Rough House* grew from actor Andy Massingham's desire to explore his own physicality as an actor. Brian Quirt helped Massingham to build a story with movement. In this case, Nightswimming's business model allowed Massingham to work in a way that suited him: firstly, alone in a rehearsal space with a video camera, and secondly, with Quirt as observer. This way of working presents a challenge to the hourglass model, demonstrating that it is a pliable model that can be used in the analysis of non-text based work. Despite its alternative process, the *Rough House* workshops still included each of the filters inherent in the model, although they operated differently in development than in the workshops of their text-based counterparts.

One

Chapter one investigates the inner workings of Nightswimming Theatre's play development model as it pertains to its development and 2011 première of Richard Sanger's play *Whispering Pines* at the GCTC in Ottawa. Using the hourglass model as a framework for analysis, the proceedings of two development workshops, in April and June of 2011, and the première performance, in October 2011, will be considered. In the spring of 2011, Sanger's script was in an advanced stage of development, although Sanger continued to make changes to the text throughout both workshops, and even during the final rehearsal period leading up to the production. I arrived at a crucial time in the play's development, when the workshop goals had become less exploratory and more focused on a short-term objective: the first production. Although the workshop in question led up to a first production, the workshop activities must still be considered new play development because the text and the writer, rather than the staging, were the focus of the workshops in April and June. The goal of new play development is to aid the writer to complete a producible version of a given draft. Many theatre makers, including Richard Rose, believe that a first production is an indispensable part of the play development process (McKinnie "Legacies" 32). In the case of *Whispering Pines*, the workshops leading up to the first production were considered part of the process. During his speech to the workshop participants, Quirt stated his intention not to finalize the script until it was absolutely necessary to do so (Workshop April). What is more, the production was given the longest possible run of previews, allowing the actors to become comfortable with a script in flux until the final moments. Hence, even the formal rehearsal and performance process is part of new play development at Nightswimming. Indeed, I noticed that several changes had occurred between the draft of

the play I read in June and the one used for rehearsals in October. Even the rehearsal draft underwent several changes, as noted in the stage manager's prompt book.

In April 2011 I conducted personal interviews with Sanger and Quirt on two separate occasions. Each of those discussions revealed a shared understanding of their artistic partnership. Sanger, a widely published and award winning poet and essayist, deals expertly in words and ideas; Quirt, who has many years of experience as a dramaturg, playwright, writing teacher and director, brings practical knowledge of theatre making to the partnership. Although Sanger's plays have been produced, and also nominated for both Dora Mavor Moore and Governor General Awards, he humbly submits his work to the influence of more seasoned theatre professionals:

I started out writing poetry, and I'm married to an actress. My actress wife has taught me to defer to actors and directors, so I tend to do that. [...] I'm quite suggestible.

(Personal interview)

Sanger identifies artistically as a poet rather than a playwright, and his statement reveals a lack of confidence in his knowledge of the theatre and his ability as a playwright. Sanger likes to work with "a director who decides," and for this kind of decision-making he believes "[Quirt] is really good" (Personal interview)⁶. In the project examined here, I witnessed the case of a particularly egalitarian relationship between dramaturg and writer, wherein their opinions were weighted equally in what became collaboration between two creators.

If Sanger is a poet-turned-playwright, Quirt identifies primarily as a dramaturg-turned-director. In a personal interview in April 2011, Quirt admits that he is not trained as a director: "I do everything from a dramaturg's point of view," he says. However, in reference

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations will refer to the same personal interview with Sanger.

to the April workshop, Quirt says “the director part of me is highly engaged at this point.” He cites the location of the workshop in the producing theatre, the presence of the actors and designer, and the need to start considering design elements as reasons why he is beginning to think about the play in terms of its eventual production. Both direction and dramaturgy are possible variants of *leadership* in the hourglass model, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, since it is common for institutional dramaturgs of new plays to direct the première. If a director is involved in a workshop of a new play while it is still being written, his or her input will be dramaturgical in nature. Moreover, a good dramaturg must share the concerns of the director; after all, plays are written to be performed. According to Quirt,

The dramaturgical mind at work [asks] ‘is the story being conveyed? Can the audience piece it together? Is the way that they’re asking us to piece it together useful? [Does] the action of them piecing it together mean anything? What could it mean to them? Will they get lost? To what degree does it amplify the emotional impact of the story?’ (Personal interview: *Whispering Pines*)

These questions which the dramaturg asks of a text in development are related to the audience *reception* and the *anticipated consequences* of performance, which are also, of course, a director’s concerns. As Quirt notes, his questions of the text are “all dramaturgical, but of course [they are] related to the impact I want it to have directorially” (Personal interview: *Whispering Pines*)⁷.

When I asked Quirt how he envisioned his role in the April workshop, he described himself as an “instigator, trying to inspire Richard to write in between the scenes he has, [and] an agitator, trying to argue for a more aggressive take on the story.” Instigation and

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this chapter will refer to the same personal interview with Quirt conducted in April 2011.

agitation take many different forms in a workshop. In an early workshop-reading done in 2006 at Alberta Theatre Projects, Quirt moved the final scene of the second act to the start of the play. Ultimately, the scene was restored to its original position, but Sanger then re-wrote the beginning. For Quirt, this episode was a success because his “quick-fix” during this early workshop had made his point: the play needed to “get to the action” more swiftly. Quirt respects Sanger’s background as a poet and he says he “urged Richard not to try to be a playwright [since] he’s not by instinct a narrative sequential writer [...]. Because his background is a poet, write it as a poet would write it.” However, Quirt identifies in Sanger what he calls “the poetic weakness” which is “to write monologues about what [has] happened, not what is happening.” The episode at ATP exemplifies Quirt’s effort to incite Sanger’s writing to action. However, Quirt’s efforts also harbour a personal artistic agenda. In Sanger’s words, Quirt “is very acute, but he has different ideas; he is very politically correct about suggesting things that might change.” When I asked Sanger who had the final say, he replied, “I almost always defer.” Although Sanger generates content alone, many of the decisions about action and meaning originate with Quirt. As the forthcoming analysis of the workshop process will demonstrate, this dynamic between writer and dramaturg is far more indicative of an artistic collaboration in that both parties have equal decision making power and input on the content and purpose of the piece.

(Night)Swimming the Hourglass

In the case of the *Whispering Pines* workshop, the *source* describes the pre-workshop draft of the play-text, while the *output* denotes both the final script, and the performance text which was built from that script. The categories of the hourglass model provide a framework for the analysis of this process, whereby a textual draft of the play, written in solitude, is

formed into the final production draft and, in the case of *Whispering Pines*, a fully supported première performance as well. In the workshop, the *source* material is shaped and re-shaped. The grains of the first draft move through the hourglass and are formed into a new work: the final script and its accompanying interpretation in the first production. The *given consequences* of the performance – in terms of its critical and artistic success – are also facets of the *output*.

In this workshop, all of the filters were at play in the hourglass: *creator perspective* and *modelling*, *leader perspective* and *modelling*, *actor perspective* and *modelling*, *design*, *conditions of creation* and *given and anticipated consequences*. The core relationship in the formation of the text was between Sanger and Quirt; hence, the two most formative filters in this case study were *creator* and *leader* perspective, which unfortunately, were not synchronized. The filters at work in the hourglass during the *Whispering Pines* workshop invited too many divergent perspectives to achieve a coherent work of art.

Conditions and Creation

The *conditions of creation* in the *Whispering Pines* workshop were indicative of standard text-centered development models. *Conditions of creation* include the space in which participants work, the time allotted them, and the organizational strategies and professional hierarchies established in the work environment. Both the April and June workshops in 2011 took place over three days in the black box space at the GCTC; the GCTC would subsequently produce *Whispering Pines* on its main stage. Since the play was programmed for the main stage, the workshop did not occur in the performance space, but it did occur in the producing theatre's building. This allowed producers, marketing managers and other theatre staff to attend initial readings; the producing staff members learned about

the play development process, while the artistic staff became familiar with some production and marketing strategies. In my personal interview with Brian Quirt, he noted a desire to develop a culture of play development within the GCTC and to educate other theatre workers about the development process. Ostensibly, the purpose of including non-artist workers in the readings was to garner support and excitement surrounding the world première of the new play. Quirt moderated the development process and set the tone for the *conditions of creation*.

In the April workshop, I immediately observed a dynamic of collaboration and shared pursuit of a common goal which had not been part of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit. While this dynamic was largely due to the fact that many of the individuals present in the workshop were working toward the production, which would not have been the case in the earlier ATP workshop and which complicates any direct comparisons with Tarragon, it was clear to me that the tone for the week was also influenced to a great extent by the way that Quirt ran the workshop. Unlike Richard Rose at Tarragon, Quirt assumed a marginal position in the room; he sat often in the corner, taking up equal or less space than other participants. Although Quirt was the designated leader of the process, his physical presence did not reinforce this role constantly throughout the workshop. Quirt encouraged Sanger to take what might be considered the head of the table, while he sat to Sanger's right. Physically, writer and dramaturg were always seated together, in a partnership which allowed them to talk quietly to one another when necessary. They also appeared to the larger group as a unit. This partnership stood in stark contrast to Tarragon, where Rose and the participating writer were in physical opposition, positioned across from one another while workshop attendees sat around and between them as if the conversation were a spectator sport. At the first Nightswimming workshop in April, Quirt and Sanger lead the team and all participated

equally in the proceedings. To their right sat three actors who would be doing the reading. Two of them, Tracey Ferencz and Paul Rainville, had been cast in the production. John Doucet stood in for Kris Joseph, who was unable to attend. I sat opposite them with the theatre prop master and the designer, Brian Smith. To our left sat Nightswimming producer Rupal Shah and dramaturgy intern Leora Morris.

Quirt structured the post-reading response period rigidly, so as to control the amount and style of criticism which could be offered by the participants. He asked that everyone write down a compliment, a strong image that struck them, and a question. He asked the actors additionally to write down a question about their character. He told me later that some artists ridicule this type of structured response in a workshop, but I have seen it done several times, and it has always been constructive in my experience. It invites everyone to contribute positively in a demarcated manner and, hence, it discourages individuals from dominating the discussion (which happened often at Tarragon). In this way, a variety of responses are offered for the writer to pluck from, and it is less likely that workshop time will be wasted on conversations which deter from the goals of the workshop (which the writer and dramaturg may, or may not have explicitly shared with the team). Moreover, Quirt believes that this feedback method equalizes the community around the table, regardless of the respondent's job description or involvement with the play, since first responses supply equally valid information. Planned responses make the atmosphere more egalitarian, since those who might be reluctant to contribute are invited to, and those who would usually speak too much have some limits imposed on them. Also, the conversation is less likely to become hostile and the dramaturg need not police the conversation because policing is inherent in the structure. Moreover, the team was not invited to critique the work, only to share compliments, and to ask about anything that confused them. According to

Quirt, only ten percent of what is said in a talkback is useful for thinking about the next draft. In private post-workshop meetings, which I was not invited to attend, he and Sanger determined which comments merited further consideration.

All of the people around the table during the development workshop would be part of the première production; hence, the development workshops also serve as early production meetings and the presence of the production team further complicates analysis of the *conditions of creation*. Sanger was faced with the cast who would inevitably speak his words on stage and, for better or worse, made changes to the text with those actors in mind. Certain details of the script had to be altered; for example, a “sweeping hair from eye” gesture which the text attributed to Thomas was not possible, since the actor who played him was bald. Quirt, although concerned primarily with the finalization of the text, also had to establish a rapport with the team who would be his partners for the next six months. Along with the larger, structural changes that Quirt and Sanger set out to make, the participants also necessitated these smaller, but sometimes significant, alterations. In the June workshop Quirt also spent time doing acting exercises and trying to establish for himself, as director, an appropriate “level of theatricality” for the piece (Quirt, workshop April). Each participant came to this workshop with several goals: to become a functioning member of a team, to ‘serve the play,’ and to achieve their own personal goals for the work. For example, actors who know they will be playing the role want to act well. They used the opportunity of discussion time to ask questions about character and history, find motivation, and even to request script changes.

In summary, the *conditions of creation* in the Nightswimming workshop were characterized by a dynamic of artistic collaboration. This dynamic did not preclude the occasional digression into various participants personal agendas, but, ultimately, the

impeding production served as a source of excitement and motivation and a reason for each participant to stay committed to the project. The production date was far enough in the future to allow for exploration and improvisation. Although the impending production may cause some to question the status of case study one as a true play-development workshop, the goals of these workshops and the proceedings were indicative of play-development workshops rather than rehearsals. Specifically, because changes to the script were expected and delivered during the course of these workshops, they must be considered workshops and not rehearsals, although they shared some features of early production meetings.

Assumed Theatrical Conventions

The 2011 *Whispering Pines* workshop at GCTC was explicitly text-centered. The dominant workshop activity consisted of reading the script and discussing the action, time function, ideas, historical context, and character development. This primary workshop activity reinforced the importance of language in this project, as opposed to movement or sound, for example. Associated with the text-centered nature of the workshop activities was a second *assumed theatrical convention*: the view of the play development workshop as a playwright-support service. Quirt identified the intricate working of time in the play to be the most challenging aspect of the play at the start of the April workshop, since many scenes occur in flashback and imagination, while others exist in “real’ time. Several times throughout the April workshop entire readings were devoted to following a particular timeline. For example, all of the imagined scenes would be read in chronological rather than textual sequence, or, a particular character’s perspective would be followed. In Quirt’s words, “Richard did a good job with the echoes [...] let’s help him get his head around this draft for future revisions” (Quirt, workshop April). His comment revealed the assumed

responsibility of the workshop to serve the playwright, as well as the assumed need for revisions.

Two further *assumed theatrical conventions* which were not necessarily implicit in the workshop structure, but which were evident in the ensuing discussion, were the desire for historical verisimilitude in the text and the assumption of psychological realism as an acting style. For example, in the April workshop Quirt asked the actor playing Thomas to identify the gap between his character's expectations and his actual experience of East Berlin (workshop, April). Quirt also asked the actors whether they understood the characters' political views from the script (workshop, April). In asking these questions, Quirt probed the actors to find each character's intellectual standpoint and emotional struggle, which would inform the delivery of their lines. In another example, actor Paul Rainville made a suggestion about his character that illustrates his shared assumption that the characters are to be played with psychological realism: "I get to present myself how I want to for the foreigner," he mused, "maybe Bruno gets to play the 'rock star' again" (workshop, April). Here, he is referring to the scene in the play in which Bruno, the former protest singer living in the GDR, meets Thomas, a Canadian academic. Bruno performs numerous antics and sings improvisations, behaviour for which Rainville sought motivation during the workshops. The group shared his perspective on acting style as a whole and close to one third of all discussion time during the workshops was spent unraveling the psychology of each character.

The pursuit of historical verisimilitude was perhaps the most influential *assumed theatrical convention* of the process. During the April workshop, Quirt questioned whether or not it is necessary for the audience to know why Renate returns to Berlin to get her Stasi file. The act of retrieving and reading the file is the inciting incident of the story (but not the

plot, since the event is not shown), as that is what prompts her to re-remember her life in Germany and confront her ex-husband. In an early draft of the play, it was Thomas who retrieved Renate's file. However, due to *included research*, the draft was drastically altered in response to the information that only those whose names are on a Stasi file may retrieve it (workshop, April). When it was discovered that it would have been impossible for anyone but Renate to retrieve her file, she became the narrator by default. The new draft tells the story of Renate discovering the secrets of her past. This piece of historical information was convenient for Quirt, who felt from the beginning that Thomas was an uninteresting narrator "because there is no risk for him, and he escapes Scott free; he experiences no drama himself." In this instance, the fruits of *included research* and the writer and dramaturg's penchant for historical verisimilitude justified an important plot change. Part of Quirt's interest in this question came from his correspondence with former residents of the GDR who had decided not to retrieve their Stasi files. The origin of the director's concern with this decision affirms that verisimilitude both historical and psychological, were the most potent *assumed theatrical conventions* in the workshop.

The desire for verisimilitude was also reflected in *actor modelling* and in the time spent educating the members of the artistic team (actors, designers and director) about the historical moment alluded to in the play; namely, East Berlin under GDR control. Quirt asked the actors whether they had a sense of the constraints of the state. He led the discussion that followed and made additional information available in the form of bibliographies, photographs, travel books and e-mail correspondence with former residents of the GDR. He also arranged a screening of a documentary about the Berlin Wall prior to the start of rehearsals in October. Throughout the workshop phase of development, and in the framing of the production, the team strove for accuracy in their presentation of the

historical moment. Moreover, the actors and director found inspiration in the lives of the real people after whom Sanger had modeled his characters. On the first day of the April workshop, Sanger described how he had loosely based Bruno and Renate on two famous East German dissidents, musician Wolf Biermann and writer Christa Wolf; the casting of actors paid uncanny tribute to their living counterparts. Paul Rainville, who played Bruno, promptly researched Wolf Biermann's life and music. He was charged with the task of writing the music to the song lyrics in the text, which he modelled after Biermann's own work. He also grew an impressive moustache for the performance, is a physical characteristic of Biermann. In addition to the actors' own research, a dramaturgy assistant from Nightswimming Theatre conducted production research for the performance. Leorra Morris' job was to compile a list of resources for the production team as well as to bring images and maps to the workshop. In reference to the map she stressed how close the characters would have lived to the Berlin Wall and how Spartan life in the East would have been. Her research was used to educate both the production team and the audience, as it was displayed in the upstairs foyer during the run. Hence, a claim to historical verisimilitude was inherent in the framing of the performance as well.

Leadership Perspective

Leadership stands out as a prominent filter in the *Whispering Pines* process analysis. It is not possible to measure this force as it operates exclusively within the workshop because the partnership between Quirt and Sanger existed years before the workshop came under my observation. However, previous developments during the writing process were discussed in personal interviews, which have been used to contextualize the dynamic between Quirt and Sanger as I observed it in the workshop.

Leadership perspective was manifest in Quirt's reading of the text, which he revealed during the workshop. His reading dictated many of his directing choices and his requests of the actors. Following the structured feedback session which accompanied the first reading, Quirt asked the group more questions which corresponded to his own unique reading of the script. He asked us to describe Willi, whom he named the absent linchpin character (Quirt, workshop April). In flashback, it is revealed that Renate has a brother, Willi, who was invited to dinner the night that Thomas arrives at Bruno and Renate's apartment in Berlin. Willi does not attend the dinner, nor does he ever manifest physically in the play. It is revealed in exposition that Willi has written a poem of resistance, which Bruno reads aloud. In a conversation between Bruno and Renate, it is relayed (in a moment of dramatic irony) that Willi gave this poem to Bruno's publisher, whom the audience knows is actually a Stasi spy. Willi is arrested and later killed when he attempts to escape from prison; his death incites the couple's decision to move to Canada at their first opportunity. In the workshop, Quirt told the cast that he sees the play as a "quartet with one missing member" (workshop, April). However, in the story, Willi does not meet Thomas, nor is he ever a part of the group dynamic (not even as described in the exposition). Thomas, whose entrance into the couple's life is the inciting incident of the sequence of events which occurs in the remembered past (rather than the action of the play, which is the remembering of the past itself), never meets the "fourth character" Willi. In fact, in the opening monologue, which functions as a prologue to the scenes in flashback, Renate states that she is "bringing her friends together again [...] but first [they] have to meet for the first time" (1). The friends who meet in the ensuing scene are Renate, Bruno and Thomas. Even the *mise en scène*, albeit unwittingly, supports the fact that the play depicts events which affect the *three* characters' lives. When Renate said, in the opening monologue, that she would be reuniting

“old friends” and “ex-friends,” the two characters, Thomas and Bruno, stepped onto the stage as she gestured toward them. There was no empty third space alluding to a fourth, missing character. Quirt’s reading of *Whispering Pines* is incorrect: the play is not a quartet with a missing member; it is a love relationship between the three characters on which Willi’s absence has no bearing. By reading the story of this play as a “quartet with one missing member,” Quirt fabricates his story (his reading) from material outside the available plot.

Quirt’s idea of a quartet with a missing member stems not from a close reading of the play *Whispering Pines*, but from the premise of a past project called *Blue Note*, which Quirt co-wrote in the same year that Sanger had his first reading of *Whispering Pines*. *Blue Note* was an experimental installation-performance piece which used monologue and music to explore the dynamic among a group of choral singers in their first rehearsal following the death of one member. Quirt’s reading of *Whispering Pines* reflects the language used in the published script of *Blue Note*. In the introduction to that publication Quirt writes, “we wanted to explore the notion of grief [...] the music they rehearse is altered by a loss- a voice is missing- and *Blue Note* follows the ensemble as the repercussions of that loss echo through the rehearsal” (Quirt, *Blue Note* 65). Echoing his own writing two years later in the *Whispering Pines* workshop, Quirt tells his group of artists, “the fourth member of the quartet died because of the risks [...] in the present [Renate] is always reminded of his death” (workshop June). The idea of a group of people coming together in the wake of their loss seems to have haunted Quirt to the extent that he saw collective and personal mourning in a script which did not facilitate this reading.

During the workshop, Quirt adamantly attempted to infuse the readings, and, by extension, the re-writings, with his story. For example, in the June workshops, Quirt told the cast, “this might not be true for Richard, but I think Renate links the forests to Willi. Being in

the woods is being around Willi. Richard can emphasize that or not...the place she has chosen to live her life is living out that grief for the rest of her life... or dealing actively with the grief” (workshop June). Yet, the reading that the forest represents Willi is a glaring misreading of the text. The dominant metaphor of *Whispering Pines*, reflected in a painting which the three characters describe constantly, is the depiction of *three* elements: sky, water and land. In its poetic monologues, the play builds a tripartite metaphor wherein Renate is the sky, Bruno the lake, and Thomas the land. As Renate describes in the play text,

Once there were two of us, and we were happy, we lived together like the sky and the water surrendering to each other, blue when the other was blue, or grey, limbs overlapping and giving way, making one line, from left to right . . . Until we met the land, the woods. (Sanger, *Whispering Pines* 65)

Although the love-triangle metaphor is firmly established, in the performance version of the text Renate also associates her brother with the forest. For example, she says that at her exhibition in Rome, where she displayed her paintings amongst pine trees, she made a forest in the gallery which was “just the kind of forest we used to go into, Willi and me” (Sanger, *Whispering Pines* 61). However, this reference to childhood forests does not belong to the play’s central metaphor, nor did it originate with the piece. The line in question was written after Quirt had asked Sanger to bring Willi “to the fore” (Sanger, “re: draft change”). While the forest may be emboldened with further symbolism in the later drafts, the metaphor at the core of the action did not change. The play’s dominant visual metaphor of sky, lake and land symbolizes the love triangle between the three physically present characters.

In this example, the dramaturg/director’s preoccupation with the theme of another project led to a gross misreading of the original play text. In this case, dramaturgical interventions, which were based on a reading of the text which the writer did not share,

muddied the central tenet of the work. The playwright was trying to write a tragic love story set against one of the twentieth century's most memorable historical moments, while the dramaturg/director was preoccupied with staging a meditation on grief. This fundamental lack of a shared central premise between writer and dramaturg was complicated further when, as director, Quirt introduced his reading, not only into the script where possible, but also into the acting and to an extent the design. The eventual result was a performance which was far more sombre than the script called for.

From Perspective to Modelling

During the workshop, when Quirt gave the actors direction, his perspective on the project informed his modelling of the *mise en scène*. In the June workshop, Quirt's direction for the opening monologue was a request for the actor playing Renate to "feel as though Willi just died." The resulting rehearsal of that monologue was melodramatic and unsuited to what the actor correctly identified as the "introspective" nature of the monologue (Ferencz, Workshop June). However, in production, the monologue had a declamatory style of presentation which I believe is the result of the director's insistence to play the scenes in the present as if Willi had "just died" (Quirt, workshop June). In Quirt's words, "the fourth member of the quartet died because of the risks... In the present [Renate] is always reminded of his death [...] grief comes in flashes- re-imagining the context of Willi's death is what is driving you...its investigating his death and your own grief" (workshop June). Unfittingly, the first monologue describes the landscape, offers exposition about the relationship between the protagonist and her ex-husband, and announces the action of the play:

Bringing people back together. Together again. People who already knew each other. Or thought they knew and could trust each other. Old friends. Ex-friends.

People who had lived through such things together that they never wanted to see each other againbut couldn't help it. (Sanger *Whispering Pines* 1-2)

The climactic action of the play is the reunion of the three friends who *lived* through the experience of East Berlin under the GDR. Mourning the distant passing of a brother anew is not the overarching action.

Although the idea of “mourning anew” was useless to the *mise en scène* at best and harmful at worst, the Willi character did hold symbolic significance which was reflected proportionately in the *design choices*. Brian Smith designed a set consisting of a hardwood floor, a large screen up stage onto which images were projected, and a column on either side of the stage which took the shape of both trees and cement pillars. The set accurately evoked both of the settings (Berlin and the shore of Lake Superior), while still allowing for the use of realistic props called for in the text. In a nod to expressionism, the set allowed fluidity, since the play requires the setting to evoke Renate’s memory as well as her ‘realistic present’; the lighting evoked harsh repressiveness of the GDR. In Smith’s design, the scene wherein Willi’s murder by the Stasi was revealed to Renate was accompanied by a bright red projection. Red came to symbolize betrayal and violence as it was used in the scene where Bruno was apprehended for lying to the Stasi and the scene when Renate and Thomas slept together. Although the *mise en scène* did not evoke a strong absence of the Willi character as Quirt had planned, it did, through the *design choices*, underscore the risk associated with the GDR and the state’s abuse of its citizens. The red did not come to represent the “fourth” character; rather, it represented the betrayal and violence which led to his demise. Willi functioned as a shadow figure representing the threats of the state, rather than a character whose absence is felt in the dramatic text or the production.

Given and Anticipated Consequences of the Mise en Scène

The two most pressing concerns regarding the staging of the piece which Quirt voiced during the workshop were the *choice of form* and the successful signification of time function. In order to help himself visualize the stylistic range available to the text, Quirt had the actors in the June workshop improvise one scene two ways. The actors were offered props: a working microphone and a kitchen table and chairs. In the first improvisation, the use of technology invited a more presentational style of performance, while the actors used the table and chairs to perform the scene using an acting style indicative of psychological realism. They performed the first version using microphones. Their lines were delivered very quickly and the actors raced around the stage, giving the scene a space-aged and emotionally disconnected feeling. The use of microphones had a distancing effect and the form became somewhat presentational. In the second improvisation the actors played the scene realistically; the characters drink in the scene and the actors played it drunk, raw and rowdy. Afterward, Quirt told the actors he enjoyed the realistic scene and he thought the audience would find a return to realism at the end of the first act immensely satisfying, especially after trying to figure out what is going on during the first half (workshop June). Quirt's comment speaks to the force of *anticipated consequences* of audience *reception*. Much of the work programmed at the GCTC is realistic in form. Quirt, according, chose to incorporate a realistic approach to the acting where possible. His staging paired realistic acting in dialogue with mime, direct address, and expressionistic set and lighting which suited the anti-realism of the memory play structure.

Quirt's greatest concern during workshop discussion was that the audience would not understand the time function; yet, the failure to adequately demarcate time shifts in the *mise en scène* was a reality of the *given consequences*. Quirt focused the team's energy on

isolating the various threads of the narrative so that the production team and Sanger could understand the way the story unfolds. Yet, reading through separated pieces of the text does not simulate the experience of the audience, and although it was a useful exercise during the workshop, Quirt's most crucial engagement with the time function in this piece belongs to his *mise en scène*. As a director, one of Quirt's most crucial self-assigned tasks was to signify the time shifts indicated in the text, especially where indicated in stage directions, in a way that made them intelligible to an audience. Yet, the time shifts were not strong in the performance. On each of the three nights I attended the performance, I noticed the audience shifting and whispering, especially in the second act wherein the "climax" of the play is repeated in the protagonist's imagination three times before it happens in "real" time. Without clear signification of time function, the plot progression faltered and the poetry of the text was lost.

The setting of the "imagined" climax scenes at the end of the play is the same as the "real time" setting (the motel Whispering Pines); however, the *mise en scène* did almost nothing to indicate that the scene was imagined, aside from a slight change in the colour of the lighting. The stage was lit from the same direction in the imagined scenes and the "real time" scenes, so that even the effect of the lighting shift was negligible. The dialogue was not perceptively different from other instance of dialogue in the play. The only indication that the scene might be imagined was Quirt's blocking of Renate as the scene began: she crouched on the stair with her back to the audience down stage right. This posture suggests that she is spying on the characters, not that she is controlling the scene via her imagination. A stronger blocking choice would have her up stage, in a place of control, which would more readily suggest that the scene before her originates with her imagination. When the final "real" encounter happened, it became clearer that the past scenes were not "real" from the

dialogue and from the visual clue that the character Bruno had aged markedly, while in Renate's imagination he looked just as he had twenty years before. However, although it is clear by the last scene that the previous scenes were not "real," the audience, in my experience of their collective response during the performances I saw, had already lost interest. It was necessary to provoke interest and better support audience comprehension in the repeated scenes in order to hold the audience's attention.

Opportunities to clearly demarcate the strange time shifts dictated by the text were eliminated during the final rehearsal process. In the production draft of the play, the first imagined scene ends with Renate (the character who imagines this scene) shouting "Stop!" and stopping the scene. This was a strong opportunity for clarity. However, in the promptbook, the word "Stop!" has been cut from the play (50). Instead, in the performance Renate transitioned out of the imagined scene into a monologue. This choice is consistent with the rest of the piece which transitions between dialogic scenes in flashback and monologic narrations in the stage present. However, by keeping this scene consistent with the rest of the play, it became indistinguishable from other scenes and could not have been read by the audience as an "imagined" scene.

As a participant in the workshop, I understood the time function clearly throughout the play. However, I do not believe my comprehension as an audience member would have been possible had I not read the script many times previously. The reviews of the production support my suspicion; as one Capital Critics Circle reviewer writes, *Whispering Pines* "attempts to pack in a great deal but remains unnecessarily obscure" (Winston), while another called it "long and tiring" (Stefanovska), and a third left the theatre "puzzled" (Langston). Quirt's anxieties that the audience would be unable to understand time-function,

which he expressed in his *anticipated consequences*, were realized in the *given consequences* of the reviews.

Conclusion

Nightswimming's mandate promises writers "on-going dramaturgical support and a developmental process that is ideally suited to their requirements," but the hourglass filter analysis reveals a fundamental gap in *leader* and *creator perspective* which marred the development process and the *output* (both the final text and the performance) of the *Whispering Pines* developmental process. Quirt and Sanger simply did not agree on the meaning of the project they were developing, and although the production team was invested and enthusiastic, their energy and skill could not make up for the fact that the neither Quirt's nor Sanger's vision of the story had been fully realized during the workshops. Quirt's preoccupation with the absent fourth character led to detrimental changes to the script and declamatory delivery of monologues which, therefore, lacked nuance. For Sanger's part, although he agreed to make Renate the protagonist, the shift was not total, so that both Thomas and Renate spent significant sections of the play narrating the story in direct address; Sanger neither committed to the editing suggestion nor to his initial impulse. The final result was a play that fell short of both its collaborators' visions

Two

The Tarragon Playwrights Unit offers its participants a text-centered development process; unlike the first case study, the writer and dramaturg are not partners in the process, and at times, perhaps, they are even adversaries. *Leadership* is represented by producer and company director Richard Rose, and in his absence by literary manager Andrea Romaldi. As is the case in many institutional development settings, these leaders function primarily as representatives of the theatre and its mandate, and secondarily as partners with unit writers. The unit represents a testing ground for potential Tarragon writers, since the theatre does not offer a commitment to the playwright or the play beyond the eleven months of the Unit. Although the leaders offer feedback to the writers, their advice comes from the perspective of the institution, rather than in a collaborative capacity. Because of these parameters, when creative alliances form, they form between peer writers in the unit, rather than between the *creators* and *leaders*.

The feedback of other writers, as well as the exposure to their work, was the most striking *condition of creation* and the most formative aspect of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit development process that I observed in the 2011 unit. The legacy of the Tarragon Theatre's contribution to the Canadian dramatic canon, and specifically its steady supply of neo-realism, comprised another aspect of the *conditions of creation* which shaped the writers' offerings even before they entered the Unit. Another formative condition was, Richard Rose's expectation of classic dramatic structure: he made it clear to Unit playwrights that he believes a play must include an inciting incident, a climax, and a dénouement. An hourglass analysis of the 2011 TPU reveals the shaping function of institutional expectations and an environment of group-think inherent in the *conditions of creation*; in the 2011 unit, these conditions yielded five scripts with nearly identical deep structure narratives neatly

fitting the conventions of dramatic structure which Gustav Freytag described in his influential 1863 book *Die Technik des Dramas* (*Technique of the Drama*).

Leader Perspective and Modelling

Richard Rose has a plot-centered, neo-Aristotelian understanding of drama which is implicit in the requirements of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit and often explicit in his dramaturgical feedback. When he became artistic director at Tarragon in 2002, Rose explained to Micheal McKinnie that he planned to make significant changes to the TPU process. Firstly, he was not interested in “reading someone’s scene” week after week as Kareda had: “I’m actually not great at dramaturging a play that hasn’t had its first draft. Because there is no way I have any perspective until there is a beginning, middle, and an end” (“Legacies” 30). The changes Rose chose to make to the unit, specifically his insistence that participants arrive at the first TPU workshop with a full draft in hand, reflect the *director’s perspective* and *modelling* not only in relation to the play texts themselves, but in terms of the entire process of creation. If Rose cannot work with an unfinished text, his perspective on playwriting holds the development of plot firmly at the center of the artistic process. He needs a “beginning, middle and an end.” This way of working suggests that Rose has a plot-centered, neo-Aristotelian understanding of drama, something confirmed by the structure of the plays emerging from the TPU.

The terminology Rose used in his comments during the 2011 TPU reveals his knowledge of, and penchant for working within, the conventional dramatic structure of Gustav Freytag’s pyramid. In the first meeting in January 2011, after the first reading of Evan Tsitsias’s play *Aftershock*, Rose asked Tsitsias to indicate the inciting incident, a term

which invokes Freytag's pyramid. Tsitsias responded with resistance to the terminology, perhaps because he had already received feedback elsewhere: a short version of his TPU play *Aftershock* had been developed as part of Magnetic North's piece/meal series and Tsitsias also self-produced what he described as a "workshop" production of the play at Summerworks, to positive reviews ("Evan"). However, Rose proceeded to describe a play he had directed previously, in which the inciting incident had occurred prior to the beginning of the play. He described the difficulty he had had directing that production, strongly implying that he would resist directing a play that did not conform to his preferred structure: the message was that TPU playwrights would see their budding creations wither on the vine unless they complied. For Rose, the inciting incident must happen after the exposition and within the first three minutes of the play: "Something needs to happen. [...] The inciting incident must be a moment of irrevocable change" (Rose, workshop January). This exchange reveals Rose's assumed *theatrical convention*: all plays must adhere to conventional, late nineteenth-century plot structure. While Rose may be justified in his desire to identify the elements of classic plot development in a play which otherwise adheres to these conventions in other respects, only one very traditional kind of play is served by this approach, an approach which does nothing to foster theatrical innovation or pave the way for emerging artists who write in other forms.

Nonetheless, most of the writers in the 2011 unit seemed to function well within the parameters and expectations of the TPU, perhaps because they were chosen based on their predicted ability to do so. All of the participants came into the Unit with at least a first draft of a first act, if not a full play; they modified their work throughout the year, in most cases staying close to their original draft. However, one writer, Bobby Theodore, chose to use the

Unit as an opportunity to explore his play using his own, less straightforward writing process. In the first meeting, Theodore brought in a first draft of the first act of his play *Swallow*. At that time he had not decided on the play's ending, but he had developed several characters, the theme, and the situation he wanted to explore. Because the plot was not fully outlined at this stage, the post-reading conversation allowed for participants not only to guess at the ending, but, in Rose's case, to also prescribe the action. Theodore expressed in the post-reading discussion that he thought a rape would occur in the second act. Rose told him that such an action wouldn't "suit the tenor of the play" and Theodore retorted with the affirmation that the play is "moving toward the tragic," inspired by opera. In the final draft, Theodore took Rose's advice: there is no rape, but the two characters have a sexual encounter of questionable ethics (one or both of them is drunk) that results in a pregnancy. In a personal interview, Theodore expressed frustration at the proceedings of the first meeting, confirming that he "got nothing out of the first reading" because Rose had expressed that the group couldn't give feedback on an unfinished play, which "set the tone for the rest of the group." My notes on the workshop indicate that Andrea Romaldi conscientiously indicated that she "didn't want to ask questions because it's not a full draft." However, she and Rose did ask several questions regarding the world of the play. At the end of that first workshop, Theodore, exasperated, told the group "I'm confused. Should I write an outline or just finish it?" to which Romaldi replied "just go with your instinct." That first meeting revealed the limitations of the TPU workshop model when the writer does not submit the desired content. Writers who work in a way which suits Rose, providing a complete draft and making the intended end product known at the beginning, seem to have an easier time in the feedback sessions than those who do not. The TPU does not tailor its process to the writer. Rather, the unit seems to serve as a prolonged test of each writer's process and, implicitly, of the

viability of any future relationship: as Rose states in his interview with McKinnie, one of the functions of the TPU is to “see how a playwright works without too much money being spent” (“Legacies” 31).

Conditions of Creation in the TPU

Tarragon’s reputation and the consequent assumptions about the kind of play Tarragon is interested in producing are present in the TPU as significant aspects of the *conditions of creation*, which exist *before* the writer enters the program. Historically, the Tarragon Theatre has been known for its development of Canadian-content naturalism, which has been described as a trademark poetic realism pre-supposing a hybrid Stanislavskian / Method acting style and which privileges the spoken word (Knowles “Reading” 135-141, Johnston 157-8). Ric Knowles describes the formal conventionality embraced by the Tarragon playwright, who, he writes, “may stretch the boundaries of naturalism, but rarely breaks through them” (*Reading* 136)⁸. The playwrights in the 2011 unit seemed to be aware of Tarragon’s reputed style, which, in turn became their initial *choice of form*. Each of their plays embraced Tarragon’s trademark neo-naturalism, sometimes threatening to stretch its boundaries but never breaking through them: one play, *Swallow*, presented a kitchen sink drama with a sinister tone, another, *Angel’s Cradle* used psychological realism within a framework of unconventional time shifts. In every case, the plays fit comfortably within Knowles’ description of the Tarragon play.

⁸ Knowles is using naturalism as a loose synonym for psychological realism and dramatic verisimilitude, devoid of its specific nineteenth-century connotations and dissociated from its biological and scientific implications present in the works of, for example, the naturalist plays of August Strindberg or Émile Zola’s “Naturalism in the Theatre”.

The critical discourse surrounding the Tarragon is part of the *conditions of creation* because it dictates the *assumed theatrical conventions* of the theatre and influences the writers' *choice of form*. Tellingly, two of the writers who confided to me in post-unit private interviews that they did not feel the Tarragon is immediately interested in pursuing the development of their work further also stated a desire to move beyond neo-naturalism and experiment with different styles in subsequent drafts of their plays. Leanna Brodie, one of the most accomplished writers in this year's Unit, believes her play *Angel's Cradle* "is the kind of piece that could benefit by having more elements that are theatrical and not naturalistic," and she plans to experiment with these elements, like the development of a chorus, now that the Playwrights Unit has ended (Telephone interview).

In contrast, one of the least experienced writers, Hayley McGee, was explicit about what she recognized retrospectively to be her attempt to comply with the Tarragon's conventions: "I was trying to figure out, 'how do you write a Tarragon play' instead of just writing my play the way I write my play" (Telephone interview). She went on to use a metaphor, ironically in line with the historic discourse around Tarragon which very often likens playmaking to cooking (Knowles, *Reading* 133): "It [is] like guessing at a recipe- how do you do that?!" (Telephone interview). McGee's voice revealed exasperation at her own adherence to the dramatic model inherent in the Tarragon conventions. That model takes shape in various ways, from the precedent of past programming to the conversation that precedes the coveted invitation to the Playwrights Unit. In McGee's case, as part of the selection process she spoke with Tarragon literary manager Andrea Romaldi, who asked McGee to describe the projects she had in mind (Personal interview). McGee described two projects, and it was the Therafields project, *Everyday Neurotics*, in which Romaldi expressed interest on behalf of the theatre, although it was only an idea at the time:

Before I started writing I had to articulate what it was about. Because I don't have any formal training and because I'm a young writer I felt really trapped by the things I had articulated. I think it really hindered me in terms of exploring the piece to the extent that I could have [...] What I really learned from the Tarragon unit is that I don't want to have to answer those questions until much, much later. (McGee Telephone interview)

For the two more seasoned writers in the 2011 Unit, that short-circuiting did not occur because they are still articulating what their plays are about. For McGee, who accepted the process entirely, the aspect of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit's *conditions of creation* which requires playwrights to articulate the "big questions" they want to "explore" fettered her artistic impulse. She felt bound by her articulation of her "big question" within a particular context in which impressing Romaldi and hitting an implicit Tarragon target had high stakes.

Tarragon's criteria governing the selection of plays and playwrights for the TPU begin with the playwright's articulation of the play's "big question"; playwrights who write in this way have an advantage in the selection process. The hourglass can help to identify the extent to which they remain beholden to this initial view of their play, and are constrained by it. In McGee's case, it seems likely that the silent wish to have her play produced at the Tarragon, her *anticipated consequences*, did not allow her to stray from the articulations which won her a place in the Unit. In an early conversation, conducted mid-process, she confessed, "I would love [my play] to be produced here [at the Tarragon] because I feel it is perfect for this theatre." Such a desire promotes adherence to institutional expectations and limitations even though, at this early point in the process, McGee was still discovering her play.

In addition to the theatre's reputation for promoting a house style, Canadian theatre's notorious financial limitations also factor into the *conditions of creation* in the TPU because they dictate the scope of potential projects. These limitations manifest in the *conditions of creation*, insofar as most playwrights (and especially emerging playwrights) are under pressure to limit the number of characters they write if they have any hope of finding a theatre to produce their work. As much as Hayley McGee desired a production at the Tarragon, she also doubted that she is "a well enough known writer to have a big cast," which her play demands (Personal interview). A "big cast" is a relative term, but conversations between the 2011 TPU participants suggest that anything more than five actors falls into this category. Leanna Brodie also acknowledged that although she desires a "village" onstage, large casts are "not practical with most theatres in Canada. So I need to find a way to work with a smaller number of people and yet have the same scope" (Telephone interview). Stylistic reputation and financial limitations are two pre-existing *conditions of creation* which are present before the writers enter the walls of the Tarragon Theatre. Other, more overtly-stated *conditions of creation* arise during the writers' time in the Unit itself.

The TPU historically, and today, is known for fostering an environment of competition among its participants simply by virtue of the access it affords to important professionals inside the theatre. In the TPU, the playwrights are aware that they are under consideration by the theatre administration. According to David Demchuck, who was a member of the unit in 1985, "the Unit became less a place for play development than a prolonged audition before a notoriously difficult audience" (Devine 15). One of the most significant aspects of the *conditions of creation*, one specific to play development initiatives within producing theatre companies, is the workshop space. On the second floor of the

Tarragon Theatre, Unit playwrights see the physical embodiment of their aspirations: their space is adjacent to a green room which provides a meeting space for actors working in the neighbouring studio, not far from the offices of the theatre's writers in residence.

Furthermore, with the presence of major figures of Canadian theatre within and around the workshop space, networking can become something of a competition. Of course, the space itself means very little without the access it affords: several of the 2011 writers expressed concern at the lack of time spent with Richard Rose and their hope to secure future meetings with him. As we shall see, the desire for both feedback and approval from Rose, and to a lesser extent Romaldi and the peer writers, colours the work that is done in the workshops themselves.

In contrast to the structured feedback procedure of *Nightswimming*, at Tarragon each TPU writer was given control of the feedback portion of their closed-door readings, sometimes to their detriment. According to Romaldi, rather than facilitating a structured response component to the feedback section of the workshop, "we ask writers to come with questions" (Personal interview). However, not all writers come with questions (or sufficient questions), nor are all writers able to facilitate a talk back after the initial shock of hearing their words read out loud. At the TPU, not all participants had the experience, skill or personality necessary to take the reins and direct the conversation. Romaldi would, if she felt the discussion was descending into counter-productive territory, gently steer the conversation elsewhere. However, in my experience that was the extent of institutional intervention, and it was left to the group to determine the direction and content of the conversation: peer feedback therefore proved to be a formative aspect of *the conditions of creation* for most of these writers.

The sustained presence of the group of peer writers is the most pervasive of the many *conditions of creation* within the TPU. Again and again, publications on the TPUs past and present identify the primary function of the Unit as “giving community to the lonely act of writing” (Rose qtd. in McKinnie “Legacies” 30)⁹. The dynamic within that given community is paramount to the overall experience. However, the very structure of the Unit creates a dynamic that can be hostile and competitive, given the stakes involved. In the 2011 TPU, my perception was that the dynamic between the writers was largely supportive and friendly. In private interviews conducted after the unit had finished, each of the writers expressed admiration and gratitude toward their peers. Many of them felt they had learned from observing the others’ processes. In the words of Andrea Romaldi, “these writers were particularly interested in each other as people [...] they were particularly open with each other about their personal experiences and how it affected their writing”(Telephone interview). However, as often happens in a group, one member emerged as a leader of the pack. In their interviews, three of the four writers specifically referenced discussions, comments and feedback from Bobby Theodore, whom I had observed to be the strongest voice during discussion periods. Theodore spoke approximately twenty percent more frequently than other participants. His feedback style included posing insightful questions about the world of the plays, sparking conversation on the themes in the plays, and also proposing events, actions or plot developments which could occur in the other writers’ texts. In Leanna Brodie’s words, “Bobby is a story editor [...] I may disagree with some of what he says, but it’s always well thought out and intelligent and he’s generous to give you that kind of feedback” (Telephone interview). Several of the writers took Theodore’s feedback to

⁹ Similar sentiments are expressed in Fraser *Unidentified 2*, Brodie Personal interview, McGee Personal interview, and Colleen Murphy qtd. in Devine 21.

heart. However, some instances of his feedback were received more consciously than others. For example, McGee relayed her gratitude at Theodore's insight into the practices, jargon, and experience of therapy. She felt he had a special insight into the world of her play as a writer who had been involved with therapy for many years (Telephone interview). However, McGee did not mention the impact of Theodore's comment during the discussion following her first reading, when he said, "Maybe Lars leaves [Therafields] early -- it would be a really good crisis" (Workshop January). At this point McGee had only written a draft of the first act; the world of her play and the characters were established, but no crises had yet occurred. In the following draft the character Lars leaves, as Theodore suggested, providing the climax of the play. Of course it would be impossible to definitively assert that Theodore's suggestion took root in McGee's imagination. Perhaps the situation in the play was leading to this particular conclusion already and he simply gave voice to that direction. I want only to point out that Theodore, who is primarily a television writer, is accustomed to group story-making; the amorphous nature of the feedback sessions at the TPU allowed him, and others, to freely suggest actions and consequences in others' plays to an extent that would not be permissible in more structured workshops, such as the Nightswimming workshops which were described in chapter one.

This current TPU structure, which allows free-form peer feedback and constant and simultaneous exposure to other writer's works during the creation process, is actually opposite to Rose's view on an ideal play-development model. Currently, the presentation of several writers' play texts over a compact five-day period demands that each writer consider and digest several emerging plays and their related feedback in tandem with his or her own. Although the writers attend the TPU in order to develop their own work, they are also expected to absorb and respond to others' work in a short space of time. In his early

interview with McKinnie, Rose identified this aspect of the TPU as a problem that he wanted to change: “too many voices too soon in the early stages is not great” (McKinnie 113).

However, the TPU structure has not been altered to include only one writer per week as Rose had hoped. Despite Rose’s reservations about this format, the writers themselves did not necessarily dislike this aspect of the work: “I got a kick out of all of them, we all write so differently, so every time I saw some someone’s piece I thought ‘oh, that’s a reminder, I don’t want to lose that element in my work, or maybe I could explore more with the levels of language’ you really riff off of other people” (Brodie, Telephone interview). But what are the consequences of a collective “riffing” off of other writers in the early stages of play development?

In the case of the 2011 Tarragon Playwrights Unit, I found that by the time the playwrights had each finished a full draft of their plays, they had converged on a single deep structure narrative: each play dramatized the struggle within, and final break from, a dysfunctional group dynamic. In Pavis’ definition of narrative analysis in his *Dictionary of Theatre*, a play’s deep narrative structure and the surface discursive structure meet at the point of mediation (commonly known as the plot’s climax). It is in this moment that the actants (non-anthropomorphic forces) inherent in the deep structure of the play make themselves visible in the surface discursive structure, “which defines the way the characters are actually realized and how they appear at the level of discourse” (Pavis, *Dictionary* 232). The moment of mediation also provides the structural shift from the “initial situation,” wherein the world is disturbed and conflict ensues, to the dénouement, or establishment of the “world re-established” (Pavis, *Dictionary* 232).

Mediation is the key moment of the narrative because it allows the conflictual situation to be resolved just as the actantial scheme (i.e the paradigmatic deep-

structure of the relations of force) “emerges” and appears at the syntagmatic level of the story being told. The mediation, that is the response to the test or resolution of the conflict, is therefore the link between the deep (actantial) narrative structures and the and the surface of the discourse where the chain of events (plot) is located. (Pavis, *Dictionary* 232)

Although the deep structure of each 2011 Tarragon Playwrights Unit play incorporates varying motifs and actants, at the moment of mediation where deep narrative structure meets surface discursive structure the *action* which defines the moment of mediation is the same. Every moment of mediation in the 2011 TPU plays involves the literal or symbolic exit of a character, which resolves the conflict and creates space for reconciliation in the dénouement.

In Evan Tsitsias’ play *Aftershock*, the actant which is represented by all the characters is *to become worthy of love*. Each of the characters pursues self-improvement to this end: Anna returns from an extreme makeover, which she underwent in the hope of improving her family life and her marriage; Becky, the younger sister, takes French lessons; Gary, the father, is obsessed with making home improvements. However, the major conflict arises when Anna realizes that by changing her appearance in pursuit of romantic and sexual love, she has injured her daughter Quinn’s self-esteem, because Quinn is the mirror image of her mother’s younger, pre-makeover self. Following the initial conflict, Anna destroys her new good looks, an action which angers her abusive husband, ultimately prompting him to leave the family home. His exit resolves the conflict between Anna and her daughter. The remaining characters each achieve their actant, “to be worthy of love,” although the character that fulfills that acceptance is not the originally identified object: Becky, who pursues neighbour Bradley’s love throughout the play, achieves her mother’s approval instead, which is a far more fulfilling confirmation of her self-worth. Anna both protects Quinn and

becomes worthy of Quinn's love and admiration by abandoning her pursuit of artificial beauty and forcing the abusive and neglectful father to leave. The world re-established after Gary's departure provides the family with a more nurturing group dynamic, a feature which the other TPU narratives also share.

In *Everyday Neurotics*, Hayley McGee creates a world where six young strangers, who move into a house together as part of a group-psychology experiment, represent the actant *to heal*. Each character has come to live in the Therafields home in hopes of correcting what the Therafields community sees as his or her integral psychological flaw. However, the structure of the home itself is flawed, and the characters must break free of the home dynamic and the institutional ideologies in order to achieve healing. The major conflict which develops is between Lars, a gay man, and the Therafields ideology, which sees homosexuality as a curable illness. The moment of mediation occurs when Lars reveals to his housemates that he has fallen in love with a man, does not believe that this represents a psychological illness, and is moving out. Lars's departure is the tug on the thread which unravels the 'family' home. The community is disbanded and the world that is re-established is far less dysfunctional. Once again, one character's exit sets the other characters free so they can also achieve the actant, in this case *to heal*.

Leanna Brodie's play *Angel's Cradle* is primarily a detective story which incorporates several subplots and explores the themes of maternal instinct and infanticide. The central narrative, which members of the unit identified during the first reading, is the detective story wherein Ethel, a female homicide detective, pursues the murder conviction of a teenage girl, Heather, who allowed her newborn baby to drown when she gave birth in her high school's bathroom stall. Since it is primarily a detective story, the play's actant, represented most clearly in the character Ethel, is *to uncover the truth*. The central conflict is

between Ethel, the detective, and Delphine, the school's guidance councillor who, although she also pursues the actant *to uncover the truth*, does so in order to protect the student who has committed the crime rather than to punish her. Delphine recognizes anger in Ethel, whose desire to punish Heather is shown to exceed her official capacity to an irrational extent. The conflict is resolved in the moment of mediation when Ethel finally confronts her adult daughter Ardyth, whose one-year-old son died years before in an 'accident,' the criminal investigation of which Ethel helped to circumvent. By forcing a confession of her grandson's murder and disowning her daughter, thus effectuating Ardyth's symbolic exit from the play, Ethel removes the moral stain from the collection of women in the play. The dénouement includes the reconciliation of mothers and daughters in the subplot, establishing a new order devoid of violence and secrets.

In Jason Maghanoy's *Hangman*, the 'family' is made up of the inhabitants of a small mining town. The conflict is between the protagonist, Allister, a jailed murderer, and the town's mayor, Bradley. The actant, represented by Allister, is *to escape*. The conflict is resolved in the moment of mediation when Allister's helper, Winston, kills Braydon, forcing his exit from the living world. This action allows Allister and Winston to achieve their actant, *to escape*. The town, which is a dysfunctional place, burns to the ground in the dénouement. The final image of two friends riding into the sunset and a sapling growing on the ruins of the town suggests the establishment of a positive new world which holds the promise of redemption.

Swallow, by Bobby Theodore, begins with a change in the familial living situation of three characters: Jay, the protagonist, his father, Merle, and Jay's daughter, Ali. In the first scene, Merle has come to live with Jay and Ali, after the death of his wife (who is also Jay's mother and Ali's grandmother). The actant, represented by both Merle and Jay, is *to protect*.

The conflict develops between Merle and Jay when Merle suggests contacting Jay's old NFL recruiter, David, to have him watch Jay's protégé, Cory, play hockey. Merle secretly contacts David, and tension escalates at a dinner party when David appears and announces to Jay that he has, in fact, recruited Cory. Jay responds to the announcement by terminating years of sobriety with a bottle of scotch. The moment of mediation occurs when Jay reveals that as an adolescent he had been molested by David. Jay violently forces David to exit the family home, an action which cleanses the family of its secret shame and brings about the new world order in the dénouement, including the reconciliation of father and son.

Although the actants found in the deep structures of each play's narrative differ, the action which defines the moment of mediation is consistent throughout all five plays: a character leaves and order is restored. The shift in the state of equilibrium in all the plays is from a dysfunctional group dynamic to a more functional and truthful one. In each of the plays, a demon must be faced and the culprit exiled in order to establish the new world order. It is not likely a coincidence that the 2011 TPU plays share a deep structure narrative. Evan Tsitsias' play, which had already established this deep structure narrative, was read on the first day of each unit meeting and for this reason served as a literal starting point for the subsequent conversations; Maghanoy's play *Hangman* was also complete for the first meeting of the TPU and therefore served a modelling function, bringing each workshop to a close as the final play under discussion. The influence of group think was, of course, stronger and more insidious in the case of the unfinished scripts, since the comments made during the workshops fed into not only a redrafting process, as with the finished scripts, but the initial plot-development process itself.

It is perhaps not surprising that the two plays which entered the unit with their plots complete would share the narrative of an escape from a stifling group dynamic: this narrative is a

favourite at Tarragon, present, for example, in *The Real World* by Michel Tremblay, upcoming in the 2012-13 season, as well as notable Tarragon plays including, for example, *Another Home Invasion* by Joan MacLeod, *East of Berlin* by Hannah Moscovitch, and Tarragon's first big hit, David French's *Leaving Home* in 1972. Given the selection process for the TPU, which favours plays or concepts which seem to fit the theatre's sensibility, it is understandable that two plays with identical and familiar deep structure narratives would be admitted to the TPU. The Tarragon is certainly not choosing simply to recycle their favourite stories with derivative pieces: the 2011 TPU plays are not overtly similar, starting with different questions, characters, and settings. The fact remains that these elements are deployed within a familiar structural framework that, ironically, reflects the experience of the Playwrights Unit itself.

The Public Readings

Tarragon is unique in providing chosen Unit playwrights with two thousand dollars along with three feedback sessions which, though perhaps of questionable value in themselves, lead to the opportunity of a staged reading by professional actors; this reading is the aspect of the TPU which most supports the writers, as they have input on casting choices, and they may invite whomever they wish as spectators. The public reading is the promised outcome of the Tarragon Playwrights' Unit under Richard Rose's administration. The readings occur in the same week as the fourth and final playwright meeting. The fourth week is the only one of the meetings in which peer writers do not attend one another's daytime meetings, since their daytime session serves primarily as a rehearsal time for the actors and the director. In 2011, Rose directed four of the five Unit readings. In consultation with the playwrights, Christina Nicoll casts the readings; actors are called for a four-hour

rehearsal in the afternoon as well as the evening performance. Tarragon does not use a single pool of actors or an acting company as does the Banff Centre, for example; actors are cast for each individual play with careful attention to each play's needs and its author's preferences. Some of the writers feel that this reading and the dedicated casting is the greatest gift the TPU experience offers: "for me not to have to produce the public reading [myself] is more than I could hope for," said Tsitsias (Telephone interview).

The public reading and the rehearsal leading up to it encompass the last five filters present in the modified hourglass model: *actor modelling*, *actor perspective*, *director modelling*, *design choices* and *given and anticipated consequences*. In comparison to the *Whispering Pines* workshop, wherein these filters were present from the beginning, the opportunities to observe these five filters in the Tarragon Playwrights Unit workshops and the reading were sparse. In the reading rehearsal which I was able to attend, Leanna Brodie and her director Leah Cherniak (Rose was unable to direct due to a scheduling conflict) worked with the actors as a group. Brodie introduced the play and Cherniak led a conventional response session after the initial reading, asking the actors to respond with something they like, something which confused them, and a question about their character. Some of the actors who were cast for the public reading had read the play previously in the first unit meeting, while others were new to the script (as was the director). Maggie Blake, who had read the character Ardyth previously, was disconcerted by Brodie's choice to eliminate the character's British accent, which was present in the first draft. Revealing her *actor's perspective*, Blake explained that she felt the character's insolence was difficult to play without the accent, but Brodie was firm in her conviction that the character should not have an accent. In the very short rehearsal time, there was little space for discussion. Most of the available time was spent while Brodie clarified pronunciation for the actors and

Cherniak made several cuts to the play. They read the modified script once again and took a break for dinner before the public reading. In this short period, *actor perspective* was limited to responses during the structured feedback session, and *actor modelling* was restricted to the way they delivered their lines during the reading itself. *Director modelling*, in this case, was expressed largely in the cuts which Cherniak made to several characters' monologues.

Cherniak also tried to clarify the time shifts in the play in the rudimentary blocking available for the reading by having actors read scenes which occur in the "past" positioned at music stands stage right and left, and to read scenes in the play's "present" from center stage.

Brodie was happy with Cherniak's direction (Telephone interview) and the reading enjoyed a warm reception from the audience.

In Hayley McGee's rehearsal for the reading of *Everyday Neurotics*, Rose's *director modelling* did not always parallel McGee's intent. Rose instructed Jesse Aaron Dwyre, playing a priest who has recently left the seminary, to seduce a woman by telling her he is a virgin (McGee Telephone interview). McGee did not respond to this during the reading, but told me later that she wished she had said, "No, I don't think that will work if you read through the scene" since the character is not as sexually aware or manipulative as Rose's direction suggests (Telephone interview). Regardless of the director's modelling, as a spectator I did not feel that Rose's direction, either in this particular instance or more generally, was clear in the public reading. Of course, it is simply the nature of a reading that the filters of *actor and director modelling* cannot be fully realized in the limited performance the convention affords.

The *design* (or what in this case could be more accurately described as *use of space*) of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit public reading expressed the conventions and limitations of the "performance." These readings are presented in the same studio space in which the

scripts were developed in the three previous meetings and lack properties, technical support, design elements, and all but the most rudimentary blocking afforded by the music stands. Risers were set up in the rehearsal hall for the audience (which consisted of close to thirty people each night) and the actors were positioned in front of music stands arranged in a semi-circle angled inward, so that they were facing each other as well as the audience. Rose's only direction for the readings as a whole was that the person reading stage directions should sit apart from the cast. In the two readings I saw, actors stood when they were "in" the scene, and sat when they were not. These design elements sent an unmistakable message to spectators that these were works in progress, not polished performances of completed scripts. Reinforcing that message, audience members were invited to comment using response sheets that were distributed before each reading.

The public readings offer the unit participants a secondary *audience* to respond to their work. For the comedies, especially, the audience was a useful tool for discovering which jokes land: laughter is a *given consequence* of the anticipatory act of writing a joke for performance. *Given and anticipated consequences* of the readings refer not only to the immediate audience reception and their completed comment sheets, but to the institutional response as well. As Leanna Brodie stated in her interview, these types of public readings have historically functioned as a "backers' audition," one of the anticipated consequences for the playwrights. The 2011 group of writers have not, as of July 2012, been made any offers of production by the Tarragon Theatre. However, the desire for such a consequence is not unrealistic: two 2010 Unit plays, *Brimful of Asha* by Asha and Ravi Jain and *word! sound! powah!* by d'bi young were produced at Tarragon in the 2011-2012 season. These plays' journeys from the TPU to the stage were uncharacteristically swift; usually it takes two or three years for a Playwright Unit writer to emerge on the Tarragon stage. Rose has indicated

to me that the theatre is keeping an eye on the progress of certain writers and their plays, and he says “Some of those playwrights may move into playwrights in residence” (Telephone interview). Rose also made it clear, however, that the theatre currently has a full stable of new talent:

We have so many playwrights in residence, we have done so many units, there at 60 playwrights floating around in 10 years [...] I think we are a little saturated. So, we are just pulling back next year, taking half a sabbatical. We will just have a couple of playwrights this time, not a lot. So in a way we can be more individual about it rather than do six. (Telephone interview)

Indeed, since that interview Tarragon has announced that three playwrights will participate in the TPU in 2012: Ines Buchli, Matthew MacKenzie, and Jordan Tannahill. Perhaps, this reduction in numbers is a first step toward Rose’s stated goal to lessen the effect of writers’ exposure to others’ work at this early stage of a play’s development.

Conclusion

Using the categories afforded by the hourglass model, a close inspection of the *conditions of creation* in the 2011 Tarragon Playwrights Unit reveals that the writers who entered the unit with unfinished plot structures re-created the deep structure narrative of the two finished plays which they read and responded to during the development process. Evidently, Rose was correct when he said that “too many voices too soon, in the early stages, is not great” (qtd. in McKinnie, “Legacies” 30) if variety is the goal. It is not only that writers are consumed with their own work and may not always be able to focus completely on the peer work they are meant to be discussing, but, as was the case in 2011, that the trajectory of their peers’ work may influence the narrative they build. I am certainly not

suggesting that this is an inevitable outcome of the Tarragon Playwrights Unit; convergence does not happen each and every year. Unfortunately, in 2011, this potential hazard does seem to have had an effect on the plays that were created over the course of the year, and, as their remarks suggest, not all playwrights were entirely happy with the results.

Three

This chapter sets out to test the boundaries of the established hourglass model that has been used in the previous two chapters to analyze the play development processes at Tarragon and Nightswimming. The hourglass that I have proposed has demonstrated its usefulness for the analysis of the text-based processes that were employed in the Tarragon Playwrights Unit and for *Whispering Pines* at Nightswimming, but in this chapter I will be focusing on an example that demonstrates how it can assist in the analysis of plays that, as is increasingly the case in contemporary theatre, are not primarily text-based. My case study is *Rough House*, a play without words or text, “written” in the body of its creator and performer, Andy Massingham.

Rough House is devised theatre, a term defined most simply as theatre without a script (Barton *Collective Creation*, xviii, Heddon and Milling 3, Oddey 4). The absence of a script is a challenge for an analysis of the development process because it is not possible to compare early and final drafts, as the previous chapters have done. The hourglass model does demonstrate, once again, the extent to which *conditions of creation* and especially *assumed theatrical conventions* affect the output. It also reveals, for the first time, the extent to which *design* may contribute to the *output* in a development initiative which invites the filter into the process at an early stage, something which is almost never done in text-based theatre. Although there is no script, there is still a *source* for *Rough House*: Andy Massingham’s desire to test and showcase years of body-knowledge he had acquired as an actor and movement teacher and to pay homage to the masters of silent film.

The analysis of the *Rough House* process is complicated not only by the absence of a script, but also by the collective nature of its creative process, which Massingham has described as “democratic” (Personal interview). It is not always possible to trace the origins

of a decision to either Massingham, the creator / performer, or any of those who had some input in the creation, including Brian Quirt, the dramaturg and director; Rebecca Picherak and Michelle Ramsey, the lighting designers; Kathryn Westoll, the stage manager; and Naomi Campbell, the producer, because each company member's function in their role was not strictly relegated to the expected function which their titles afford them. For example, in the *Rough House* process, actor and lighting designer generated the performance "text" together through improvisation, while the stage manager and producer sometimes played editing and artistic feedback roles traditionally held by a company dramaturg.

This chapter charts the ways in which raw body knowledge evolved into a complete performance. The *source* in the *Rough House* process is a living entity, the body-knowledge of performer Andy Massingham, which has been acquired over many years. As Brian Quirt put it, "we started with what Andy could do" (Personal interview: *Rough House*). This aspect of the *source* is paramount because unlike a text, it is not interpreted or built upon by the filters as they move toward a production, as in the *Whispering Pines* study; nor does the creator reflect on the filter input, changing the script in response to them in solitude as the peer writers did in the TPU. Rather, Massingham, and his body knowledge, respond and evolve *in response to* those filters in the same moment as they respond to the *source*.

The immediacy associated with the improvisational creation process of *Rough House* affected the *given and anticipated consequences* of the performance. *Rough House* was more critically successful than *Whispering Pines*. Its success as a performance can be attributed, in part, to its creation process, whereby the living source responds immediately to the input, or shaping mechanisms, of the filters. The living source of the *Rough House* process interacts with each filter, rather than being whittled away or diluted by their powers; the living *source* shapes and reshapes itself and expands through its interaction with the

filters and through its interaction with audience in performance, creating an artistically satisfying and critically successful performance.

Methodology

Rough House is one of Nightswimming's most critically successful performances to date, winning a Dora Mavor Moore award for Outstanding Performance and earning nominations for Outstanding Direction, Outstanding New Play, and Outstanding Production. It is also a hallmark of Nightswimming's versatility as a company. Because *Rough House* premiered in 2005, and this research project began in 2010, the development process has been investigated using multiple interviews, published and private. The performance has been recorded on DVD, which I have studied carefully. Although video viewing is limited, in that it does not account for the live experience of the theatrical event shared with other members of an audience, it has allowed me to watch the recording multiple times at different stages of the study, and it lessens my dependence on memory in my account and analysis of performance. Moreover, since *Rough House* toured across Canada for several years after it was devised, this retrospective study is able to take into account the critical reception of the piece as a whole, in its incarnations across Canada. Most importantly, because of the nature of the process, which was collaborative and physical, the time that has passed since it was developed and performed has allowed the creators to reflect on the experience, giving them a depth of insight and an ease of articulation which would not, perhaps, have been afforded them in 2005. The interview and video material has allowed an adequate rendering of the process, whereby each of the hourglass filters and their variables have been identified and addressed. Moreover, the wisdom of hindsight has invited great depth of reflection in the personal interviews with the creators that have been conducted as part of this study.

Rough Housing the Hourglass

An important consideration in the analysis of *Rough House* is that all members of the creative team transcend their official roles and titles. Most crucially, lighting designers Rebecca Picherack and Michelle Ramsey also perform in *Rough House* as puppeteers, since they operate the moving light bulb that functions as a character with which Massingham interacts, which they call “the puppet” (Picherack Telephone interview¹⁰). There is nothing automated about the lighting design in this show. Everything is operated live in response to Massingham’s movements. Picherack felt that the show was different depending on who operated it, herself or Michelle Ramsay, because their “personalities came into it.” Depending on the designer’s performance, the light could be more or less “malicious,” “elegant,” or “sneaky.” In *Rough House*, the light is a character and the designers are also performers.

Much of the material for the show was generated in improvisations between Picherack and Massingham, a fact which makes them both *performers* and *creators*, with Picherack additionally embodying the *design*: “I really felt like a co-creator,” she told me, “I invented things for [Massingham] to respond to and we all figured out together how to integrate them into the piece.” Picherack was responsible for creating the world of the play and the rules for it which, together with Massingham, she defined with her lighting design and operation. For example, when they were working with the idea of light being “slippery” in rehearsal, Picherack would project a light box, which Massingham would enter, only to have it slip out from under him, making him fall. Picherack, who was also educated in the

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations attributed to Picherack are taken from the same Telephone interview.

films of Buster Keaton, provided Massingham with the banana peel on which the slapstick of the piece demands.

The *assumed theatrical conventions* relevant to theatrical devising account for the amorphous nature of the roles played by the various participants in the process that created *Rough House*. The term *devising* is introduced here to identify the *Rough House* process as one that began without a text as its *source*. This basic premise of devising, which demands irreverence for text in favour of independently, and often physically-generated, content, is included in the definitions of most major publications on the subject (Barton, *Collective* xviii, Heddon and Milling 3 and Oddey 4). Additional features of devising which can be observed in the *Rough House* process include

An altered relationship to both *time* and material *resources*, shifting the priorities associated with both from preoccupations with product to a focus on the developmental process(es) involved [...] a fundamental *interdisciplinarity* [and] heightened sensitivity to and engagement with *physical spaces*. (Barton, *Collective* xviii)

Moreover, the term *devising* is used here, rather than its more political sibling *collective creation*, because “the term ‘devising’ has less radical implications, balancing greater emphasis on skill sharing, specialization, specific roles, increasing division of responsibilities, which as the role of the director/deviser or administrator, and more hierarchical company structures” (Oddey 9). I find the term *devising* adequate to describe a theatrical convention encompassing *conditions of creation* which invite dramaturgical editing of content and improvisational generating of content from each member of the production team, while simultaneously delineating members’ roles according to their specializations in theatre practice.

The exploratory mode of creation which characterises the *Rough House* process was necessitated by its *source*: Andy Massingham’s physical virtuosity and his creative sensibility. Furthermore, the early creative environment was established first by the nature of the commission which *Nightswimming* offered Massingham. As Quirt puts it, “He needed time and a space, so we gave him a lot of money” (*Hinterview*). This offering of time, space and money is an example of a play development process which serves the creator and is built according to the needs of the project to an unusual degree. Massingham began work in a Toronto rehearsal hall, cataloguing all of his physical movements with a video camera. Quirt did not ask to be involved in the early stages of the devising process. He simply asked that Massingham catalogue his movements and “start to think about how they might fit together” (*Hinterview*). At first, Massingham simply catalogued his pratfalls on video; next, he composed short improvisations to music, which he videotaped (Massingham Personal interview).¹¹ After his rehearsals, he would go home and watch the video, often without sound to better study the movement. Massingham began his work in solitude, not unlike the writers in the Tarragon Playwrights Unit; when he was ready to share his material with the rest of the team, the first step was further improvisation, not a conversation. In fact, in the early stages Quirt invited choreographer Julia Sasso to lead Massingham in movement exercises which Quirt felt would open Massingham up to his own range of movement. According to Massingham, Quirt’s approach to devised work was so successful that Massingham uses it in his own directorial approach: “he introduced me to the idea of making an offer: ‘make me an offer; what could there be, not what is there.’” This attitude to the creation process derives from the *assumed theatrical conventions* of devised theatre and contributes to the establishment of a safe space for play which characterized the *conditions of*

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations attributed to Massingham come from the same personal interview.

creation in the *Rough House* workshop. The entire development process for *Rough House* is markedly physical and exploratory, contrasting with the textual and traditional processes of both the Tarragon plays and the other Nightswimming case study, *Whispering Pines*.

Leadership

As the leader of the process, and as both director and dramaturg, Quirt constructed and conducted the devising process. The framing of the process, largely constructed by Quirt, with Massingham's intentions as the starting point, determined the style of the performance. According to Heddon and Milling, in improvisational devising practices "it is the specific nature of the task, game, rules or structure within which improvisation occurs that conditions the possible outcomes, and contributes to the style of the resultant performance" (9). The trademark style of *Rough House* is found in the interaction between movement and light, a style which developed through Quirt's decision to include lighting designer Rebecca Picherack early in the devising process. "I knew Picherack would be interested to hang out with us and watch Andy" Quirt remembers, "what might she do to light Andy if we were in a theatre?" (*Hinterview*). Quirt fostered the core relationship in the group-improvisations between Massingham and Picherack, and established parameters that created opportunities for this collaboration: Picherack would be on the lighting board, and she would put new lights up every day. Massingham would improvise with the music *and* the lighting (*Hinterview*). As the play evolved, Picherack's role in the composition of the piece proved to be vital. In fact, her idea to suspend a light bulb on a cable above the stage solved the major structural question: how to begin and end the show? In the first moments of the performance, Massingham's character "meets" the lightbulb, which winks at him. Hence, through improvisation the lighting designer instigates a relationship between light and

movement, between her equipment and the performer, which characterizes the whole show. The light bulb, as a physical incarnation of light, as well as the other modes of lighting, interact with Massingham throughout the performance. In this “solo” show, light plays the roles traditionally attributed to other characters: the adversary, the helper, the soothsayer, the stranger, and the object to be won. In Massingham’s words, “If there is anybody who wrote this play with me, it was Rebecca. She really got into the whole world; her lighting designs were as playful as anything I could have come up with” (qtd. in Findlay 6). Since the relationship between performer and lighting designer was extremely generative, the role of the dramaturg in this process was, at one level, simply to foster and further that creative collaboration.

The most crucial role of the leader in a devising situation is to choose the right participants, and to foster an environment of collaboration and mutual respect that invites creativity. In Massingham’s words, Quirt has a gift for gathering around him “quiet, creative people who get the work done.” Even Campbell, who, as Nightswimming Theatre’s producer, was not necessarily in a creative capacity, conceived of a set that multiplied the performers’ opportunity to create images with light exponentially; some of the finest moments of artistry in the performance could not have existed without her ingenuity, and *Rough House* could not have been what it was without Quirt’s careful construction and mediation of the production team and their work.

In illustration of the team’s cohesive creation methods, the story of the discovery of the final blackout is a microcosm of the *Rough House* process because finding the ending was truly a group effort. *Rough House* concludes with the most hypnotic of blackouts. Massingham sends the light bulb, which hangs on a cable center stage, swinging in a circle around the stage in total blackness; it mesmerizes the audience as its circles grow smaller and

smaller until, as if by magic, it disappears into the blackness of the stage. This ending was discovered during a week of preview (or workshop) performances during a daytime “jamming” session. Picherack created the lighting installation, Massingham set it in motion, and Quirt had the patience and authority to ask the others not to touch the spinning bulb, but instead to wait and see what it would do. That final moment, which Massingham calls a moment of “church” onstage, was the last improvisation they made. After discovering this unique blackout, they instinctually knew the show was finished.

Instinct, as well as company input, played a large part in Quirt’s second function as editor of the performance. As orchestrator, he is responsible for understanding how the artists in the room work best and for facilitating their work. As editor, he is responsible for organizing the material into a coherent form: “This was the funnest show to work on,” Quirt explains, “I get to watch this wonderful performer and this wonderful lighting designer bounce ideas off each other, and I get to pick which ones are best; it’s a pretty good job” (*Hinterview*). As the two performers improvised, Quirt collected the “strange wonderful” moments they created and started to ask “where should they happen?” (*Hinterview*). Although orchestrating the flow of the piece was Quirt’s responsibility, producing a coherent form was a group effort. Choreographer Julia Sasso advised Quirt to just “pick an order” to start with, rather than agonizing over the justification for doing so. His instinct for the initial sequencing became a skeleton for the show, just as the group instinct for the final blackout became its ending.

In *Devising Performance*, Dierdre Heddon and Jane Milling discuss how frequently artists attribute choices made in the devising process to instinct, as the artists who devised *Rough House* have. Heddon and Milling investigate the notion of intuition, drawing on Foucault to conclude that

Intuition functions paradoxically within improvisation in the devising process. An element of material generated by improvisation is recognised by company members as a performance solution, and intuition authenticates that moment as original and a creative revelation. Yet, improvisation is always already conditioned by the mannerisms, physical abilities and training, horizons of expectations and knowledge, patterns of learned behaviour of the performers [...Intuition] is a function of the establishment of a shared set of patterns and experience, and thus is a recognition of what is the 'same' rather than what is original, and is part of what an audience can then recognise as a style of work. (10)

Although members of the *Rough House* devising process have not trained in improvisation together, as may be the case with the companies to which Heddon and Milling refer, they nonetheless share “horizons of expectations and knowledge” in which their group intuition is based. In the language of the hourglass, the “horizons of expectations and knowledge” are contained within the *choice of form*, about which creator/performer Massingham and director/dramaturg Quirt share *perspective*. *Rough House* was, from the outset, an opportunity for Massingham to explore his physical capabilities, particularly his pratfalls and clowning skills. Hence, the show was likely to be silent, solo, and grounded in physical comedy. Moreover, both Massingham and Quirt are self-proclaimed experts in the genre of the silent film, and particularly the oeuvres of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Massingham has studied every film on his own, as has Quirt, who took a class on the genre under Josef Škvorecký, the Czech dissident whose novels and screenplays often draw on comedy and jazz; he believes that because of that experience he and Massingham shared “a lot of the same knowledge” going into rehearsals. Picherack also studied film in university, including the classic silent comedies. The editing process for *Rough House* has been

described by participants as “democratic” or “intuitive,” and it is the shared perspective on the *choice of form* for the piece that made it so.

The Dramaturgy of Performance

Not surprisingly, given this shared perspective, to experience *Rough House* is to observe the life’s journey of a Chaplinesque figure encapsulated in the style and dramaturgy of a Buster Keaton film. Like Keaton, Massingham’s character in *Rough House* has the curiosity of a child; like Chaplin, his comic conceits are clever, enhanced all the more by his form and ageless features which, as Kyp Harness writes of Chaplin, give him the look of “an eternal child” (4). These are features which Quirt saw in Massingham. In fact, the idea for *Rough House* emerged during work on a dance based play *Whirpool*, in which Quirt, as director, had cast Massingham in the role of a baby. Moreover, the dramaturgical structure of *Rough House*, which Quirt compiled ‘intuitively,’ closely echoes Keaton’s classic film dramaturgy. In Daniel Moews’ study of Keaton’s filmography, he identifies a “basic fantasy patten of failing, sleeping, waking, and winning” in each of Keaton’s films, and, in the “more complicated films [...the hero] awakens first into a major role reversal, an unpleasant new identity [...] but in these films, too, he eventually improves and then succeeds where he earlier had failed” (3-4).

Rough House loosely follows the fantasy pattern of Keaton’s complicated films. As previously discussed, Massingham’s character immediately “meets” the light bulb upon his entrance into the “Rough House”. He quickly learns that the bulb responds to him, since it blinks when he snaps his fingers. But alas, the bulb has a mind of its own, and quickly grows weary of the clown’s commands. This attempt to control the light steadily is the protagonist’s first failure; his objective is to learn to control the environment around him. Subsequent

attempts to control the light lead into a series of gags that hearken back to the Keaton film *College*, which also features a hilarious parade of sporting failures. In *Rough House*, the clown boxes with the lightbulb (only to miss and spin himself around when the bulb is quickly yanked from his reach), attempts to catch the bulb by launching himself from a chair (only to tumble to the floor), performs a weight lifting sequence (only to drop the ‘weight’ on his foot), plays a game of tag with the light (only to lose when the light hides in the corner above his head), tries to lift a box in a shadow sequence (only to find his head has dropped to his knees as a result), dances with a chair (only to fall and smack his face into his ‘partner’), plays baseball (only to be hit in the groin with a pitch), bowls (only to lose the ball), and races a bike to the soundtrack of a rousing mambo (only to be catapulted through the air in a stunning backflip which lands him flat on his back). As in the classic silent films, the sporting failures are interspersed with daily activities which are sometimes funny, but also reveal the humanity of the character: he fails to set a bowl on a chair, he cuts himself shaving, showers, and examines his aging face in the mirror. After the sport fail sequence, the clown goes to sleep, only to awaken into a new reality and a new body. When the protagonist awakes, his physicality has changed and he has entered into the “new reality” which Moews identifies in certain Keaton films. The *Rough House* clown arises from his bed painfully slowly, and proceeds through the last leg of his journey in the body of a much older man than he was when he went to sleep. His objective is still to catch the light, but now the strategy is far less athletic. He goes fishing and the bulb is his catch; like a large fish, one must wrangle, it nearly gets the better of him. Using the chair like a walker, the protagonist approaches the bulb one last time and sends the light on its final journey, escaping unnoticed from the stage as the audience, hypnotized by the movement of the light, watches the bulb circle and disappear into the bowl.

Although they never entertained a conversation about meaning, since Quirt learned early in the process that “conversations about meaning weren’t useful to Andy,” their shared perspective on the various components of *form* yielded a synchronized perspective on the performance. Quirt and Massingham’s interpretations of the performance, which they finally articulated after the show had closed, are nearly identical. In retrospect, Massingham claims, “I realized I was telling my own story.” His ability to articulate the story he was telling came from discussing the show with children in a talkback session.

It’s all about obstacle[...]one of the great keys of slapstick and comedy, is that the objective is one thing, but the obstacle is your material [...] My story, is I am trying to get from one entrance to another entrance across the stage, and I have a number of things blocking my path...which is autobiographical to me.

The story Massingham lives as he performs *Rough House* is, simply and profoundly, the story of a life. And although both Massingham and Quirt thrill to hear the vastly divergent interpretations their audience have articulated about the show, performer and director, creator and dramaturg, share the same vision of the piece. When I asked Quirt to share with me the story he experiences when watching *Rough House*, his description echoed Massingham’s: “The way I experience it is...as an everyman, and a person struggling with the external uncontrollable forces of his environment [...] whether you choose to see them as literal or metaphoric or psychological manifestations.” *Director and creator perspective* on the development process for *Rough House* matched during and following the rehearsal process. Moreover, the two men shared a common education in physical comedy through their love of silent film.

Of course, to wordlessly tell the story of the everyman is to pay homage to the masters of silent film, whose successes relied on the accessibility of their narratives, just as

comedy relies on obstacle. Massingham is something of a Chaplinesque figure in *Rough House*, the everyman character, whom, in Kyp Harness's words is "the tramp whom laughter makes immortal ... [who shares] in our struggle, our mystery and folly"(8). And, in the making of *Rough House*, as Harness says of Chaplin, "like all truly great artists, [he] only had one real subject: himself" (8). *Rough House* tells the story of life's journey, the journey of learning, struggle in the world and inevitably aging; it tells the story of the journey every one of us must take.

In the Basin of the Hourglass

In the basin of the hourglass model dwells the public reading, or in this case, performance that grows from the workshop, its *reception* by the audience, the *given consequences* of the process, critical *reception* and criticism, and the *output*. One of the most important aspects of the *Rough House* process was that during the rehearsals there was a low value placed on *anticipated consequences*. Of course, every process anticipates consequences; for example, the team felt that the art they were making was funny, but needed an audience to corroborate that assumption. However, the process of devising was undertaken in a low-risk environment, as the team was not constantly aware that they were working toward a product; the process was the focus, with a possible workshop performance as a thrilling possibility, rather than a crippling deadline.

The low risk environment proved to yield high rewards. Massingham says of his time in rehearsal with Quirt and Picherack, "we didn't know we were contributing to the show, we were playing [...] we were scene partners [...] those were the happiest days of my career." What is more, the decisions they made in rehearsal were never considered final. The performance continued to evolve, even before its early audiences. When the team felt ready

to share their work, Nightswimming booked a two-week run at the Toronto Theatre Centre. Quirt decided to program multiple preview performances, during and after which the show continued to evolve: “that was the wonder stroke for me [...] when we opened I was very sure of the audience, I was very sure of myself,” said Massingham. By allowing the team to continue improvising during the day while doing performances at night, the *reception of the preliminary audience* factored into the creation process as well. The final improvisational partner was the audience, who responded to Massingham’s performance in varied, but ultimately positive ways. As the structure of the show was being finalized, so was the timing and rhythm, which always changes when a performance has a full house to laugh at the jokes and complete the energy in the room.

Although it was not planned, that first workshop performance evolved into the première performance of *Rough House* because the team found the ending during the workshop’s run. Although Nightswimming planned the preview performances as a platform from which to attract possible producers, it became a full-fledged production because the team decided during the run that they were ready for it to be so. What is more, they received positive criticism from media and theatre venues. Although they did not successfully court a producer, they were welcomed by theatres across the country to tour the show, which was cost effective enough for the primarily dramaturgical company to fund.

Using the language of the hourglass, we might identify the performance of *Rough House* as the final phase of development, completed by the presence of an audience. The DVD which was filmed during that time is the *output*, in that it is to this devising process what a final, post-production or post-reading script would be to a new play: the document which is circulated in an attempt to secure additional performances. The script is the document that allows a new company to turn the hourglass upside down and begin the

process again, using the output as the source for a new process. However, since the dramaturgy of *Rough House* is inscribed in Massingham's body, recorded in his muscle memory, the DVD cannot be a starting point for a production in which he does not perform (although an ambitious performer might try to learn the routine by watching the video to launch his own version of it). Herein lies the challenge of devising physical performance: the script lives, and although a document remains (the DVD) it is a memory of a living experience rather than a blueprint for a future performance. Instead, it functions as a marketing device for potential future performance by the creator.

Conclusion

The hourglass model facilitates the analysis of a devised creation model which, because it is described as collaborative and democratic by the participants, can seem accidental or fortuitous when it is only described by observer or participant. Instead, the hourglass reveals that the *Rough House* devising model is a system of defined roles which invite creativity from each discipline and demand hard work between contributing artists with varied, but equally respected, skills. Moments of collaborative creation are not simply "intuitive," but are actually based on adherence to the *choice of form* and the participants' shared *perspective*. The hourglass model offers the analysis of devising practice a precise language with which to speak of creative forces which have often been expressed in terms that exclude comparison to more conventional ways of making theatre. In analyzing both text based development and devising using the same language of the hourglass, I employ a new and common language of dramaturgy practice which identifies existing components in both processes.

The filter categories of the hourglass model afford the analysis of the *Rough House* devising process a framework within which the shifting roles of the participants are brought into focus. Only the *source* and the *output* in this case study are radically divergent from the textual drafts of the text-centered development initiatives. The *output* is represented by the DVD, and although it can function as a document which circulates with the intention of pursuing a producer, it does not serve as the blueprint for future performance as would a text. Nevertheless, the filtering mechanisms defined by the hourglass model make useful categories for exploring the inner workings of a development initiative and analysing the function of each filter on the artistic output. The retrospective verbal expressions of *creator and director perspective* on the meaning of *Rough House* prove to be synchronized. This synchronicity is a product of the shared *creator and director* perspective on the process, and their *choice of form*.

Unlike the text-centered processes, where *assumed theatrical conventions and conditions of creation* played pivotal roles in the development of the works, the physical and performative nature of the *Rough House* process reveals that *design* is the most formative filter for this case study. This conclusion is due to the particular nature of the working relationship between Massingham and Picherack, and would not have been possible without the director's establishment of the workshop parameters. Like many of the best devised works, *Rough House* made a success of their work-in-progress, which, through its collaborative development model consecrated a narrative in movement and light. The audience responded in varied ways, and often saw in the performance elements and ideas which the production team had never thought of. Yet, the participants in the development of *Rough House* share a story, a framework for creation, and a foundation of style upon which their improvisations flourished and their subsequent performance thrived.

It was possible to consider the development of *Rough House* within the framework of the hourglass because participants held defined roles attributed to conventional theatre; yet, the hourglass may be fundamentally at odds with the devising process. In *Devising Theatre*, one of the most quoted volumes on devising, Alison Oddey states that “devised theatre is an alternative to the dominant literary theatre tradition, which is the conventionally accepted form of theatre dominated by the often patriarchal, hierarchical relationship of playwright and director” (4). The hourglass model was built in reference to the hierarchy which Oddey describes. The playwright or creator’s perspective is found at the top of the model, inherent in the *source*, with leadership perspective in close proximity at the top.

Even the relatively hierarchical devising process of *Rough House* destabilizes the hourglass. The examination of this process reveals the supremacy of Picherack’s lighting design. This fact changes the model, which should find design at or near the top of the hourglass, as an additional *source* in tandem with Massingham’s concept for the project. Unlike a performer or designer in conventional theatre, Picherack did not simply interpret a *source* which Massingham created alone. She worked with him to envision and enliven the world created by their performance.

Although the categories afforded us for consideration by the hourglass are relevant in most creation processes, the more collaborative and less text-centered the process, the more the hourglass loses its vertical shape. It is yet to be seen whether the hourglass model would be useful, or even usable, in a more radical, company-oriented devising method such as one finds within the Wooster Group or Eugenio Barba’s Odin Teatret. Yet, I suspect that in the analysis of a truly collective creation, the hourglass metaphor may metamorphose into a European roundabout, where each artistic element converges on the process at equal

intervals, circling together until they have built an output which arises from the center of the chaos.

Conclusion

The hourglass model for play development analysis offers scholars of dramaturgy a framework and a vocabulary for cataloguing the working parts of play development initiatives. When scholars analyze a play-text, there are several useful categories available with which to organize observations including space and time, character, dialogue, plot and story, genre, and spectacle; these are the basic categories which volume after volume of dramatic theory have used as entryways into their subjects since Aristotle wrote the *Poetics*. Similarly, the hourglass model proposes that the *source* (containing the creator's *perspective*), *leadership*, *company modelling*, *choice of form*, *conditions of creation* (including *assumed theatrical conventions*), *design*, *given and anticipated consequences*, and *reception* are some of the preliminary categories from which to approach analysis of play development.

The three case studies included in this project tested the uses and limitations of the hourglass model and its categories. The *Whispering Pines* workshop at Nightswimming and the Tarragon Playwrights Unit both fit easily into the hourglass, since they employ traditional roles and do not challenge established hierarchies. Yet, the hourglass model afforded clarity to the analysis of both development workshops at Nightswimming. In this analysis of the *Whispering Pines* process, creator and leader *perspective* were the most formative filters. Because the perspectives did not match, the resulting performance and final play-text reflected neither collaborator's vision. Contrastingly, in Nightswimming's second, movement based development workshop *Rough House*, the shared perspective between creator and leader, and the knowledge of and adherence to the *choice of form* by all members of the development team, led to a satisfying process and successful *output*.

The hourglass analysis proved that shared *perspective* between *leadership* and *creator* is integral to a successful process. Judith Thompson, who worked with Quirt on *Such Creatures*, uses the word “vision” rather than *perspective*:

Brian [Quirt] is an amazing dramaturge. He says, “yes, yes, yes, and then....but? [...] Or, "I notice that here you said this and there you say that" very gentle, but with a powerful vision, *always in alliance with the writer's vision*. (e-mail, my italics)

The analysis of the *Whispering Pines* process showed that Quirt’s vision is not always in line with the creator’s, as is the case with many leaders part of the time. However, it is interesting to note Thompson’s identification of shared *perspective* as a prerequisite for a successful collaboration. Her experience as a writer corroborates the findings of this study. Shared perspective (or vision) is necessary for successful collaboration between creator and leader, or writer and dramaturg.

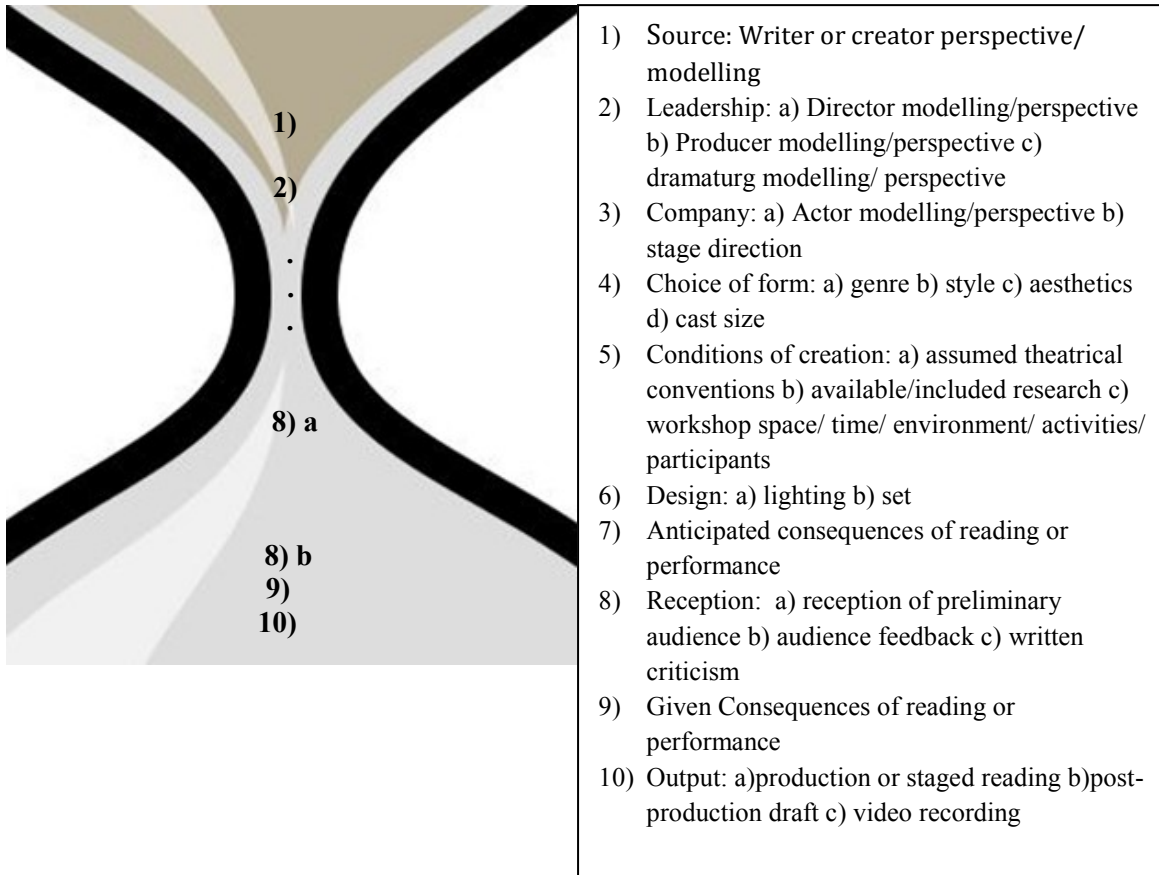
Along with the text/movement dichotomy, this project was designed to include two companies with opposite business models: producing and non-producing. Since only the non-producing company promises its creators a production, the two companies create vastly different *anticipated consequences* in their processes. In the Tarragon Playwrights Unit, the desire to have their work staged kept some writers married to the articulations that won them a place in the unit. Rather than test the boundaries of their projects, they kept within the limits of the discourse surrounding the theatre institution and within the bounds of the conversation which had facilitated entry to the process. Conversely, both Sanger and Massingham were promised (eventual) production, so any *anticipation consequences* were focused on audience *reception*.

As Massingham articulated when I interviewed him, removing the kind of pressure that the Tarragon Playwrights Unit participants expressed, conceiving of the *Rough House*

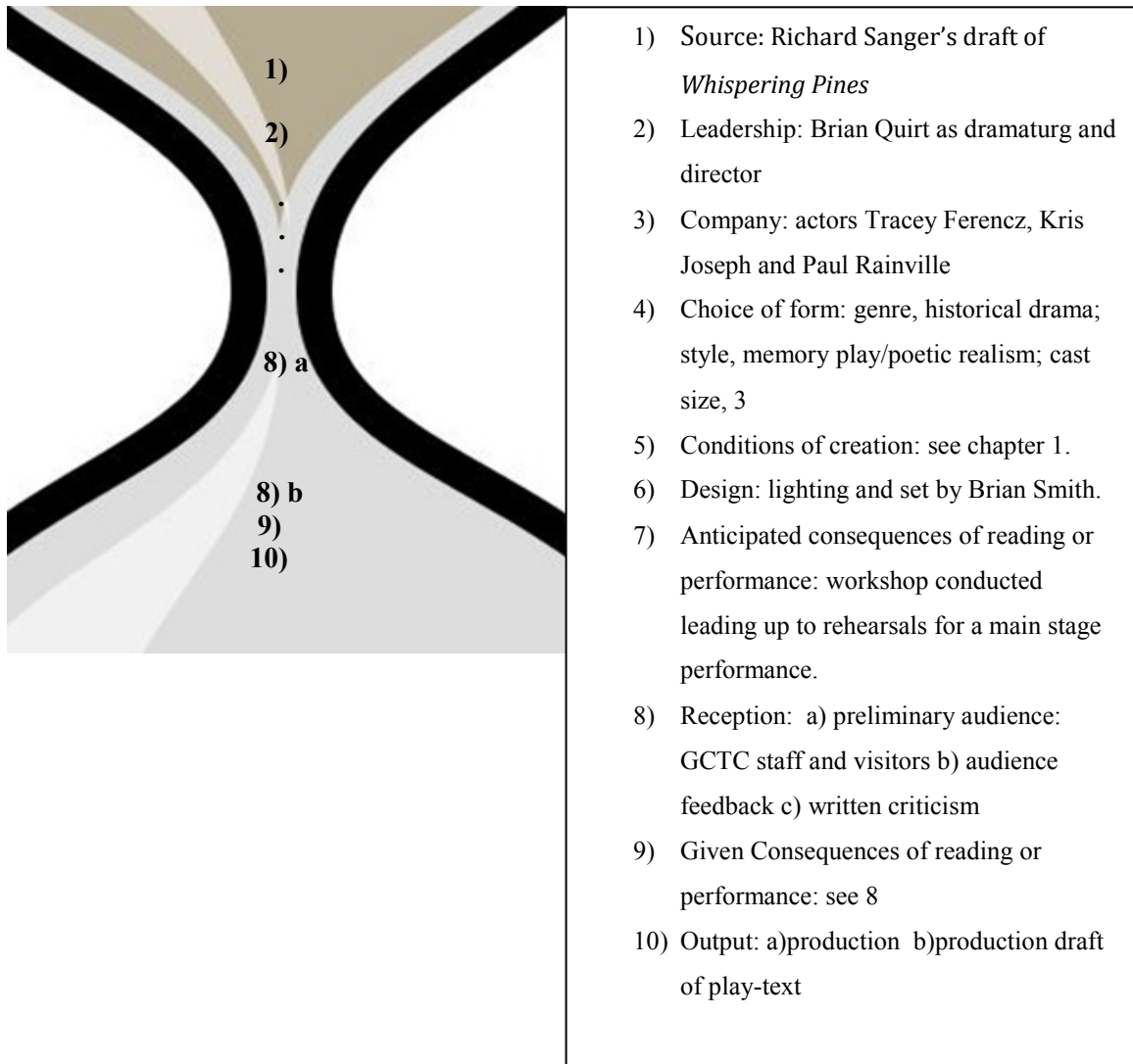
creative process as an opportunity for each artist to make offers to the group, rather than a test that one could pass or fail, was crucial to the success of the process. While the TPU process *could* encourage this feeling of experimentation by conceiving of the workshops as a forum for presenting offers that might be taken up or abandoned in subsequent drafts, Richard Rose's dual presence as dramaturg and artistic director makes the stakes for such risk too high and the weight of his own suggestions too heavy. While TPU has a long and esteemed tradition consecrated during Urjo Kareda's remarkable tenure, perhaps now the process would be better served by having Andrea Romaldi or a designated and dedicated dramaturg lead the TPU workshops. The hourglass helps to articulate what the effect would be: Rose's role would shift to the bottom of the hourglass, his feedback part of the *given and anticipated consequences* (7) and the *reception* (8) rather than, as at present, the dominating influence on the filtering process.

This study has proved the pragmatism of the hourglass model's categories of analysis, which serve as entry points for naming the working parts of each development process, and while the main intention of this thesis has not been to evaluate the success or failure of any process, but rather to test the hourglass's viability, one future application of the hourglass could be to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of particular development processes. In that light, the positive experience that Massingham and Quirt described in interviews, and the positive critical response that *Rough House* received, suggests that their process was the most successful of those that I have analyzed. Since Quirt went on to a somewhat less successful collaboration with Richard Sanger, the experience of *Rough House* clearly did not supply him with a formula or template that he can now apply indiscriminately to his dramaturgical work with foolproof results. I doubt that an awareness of the hourglass and the insights that it enables would ever provide a recipe for guaranteed success, since

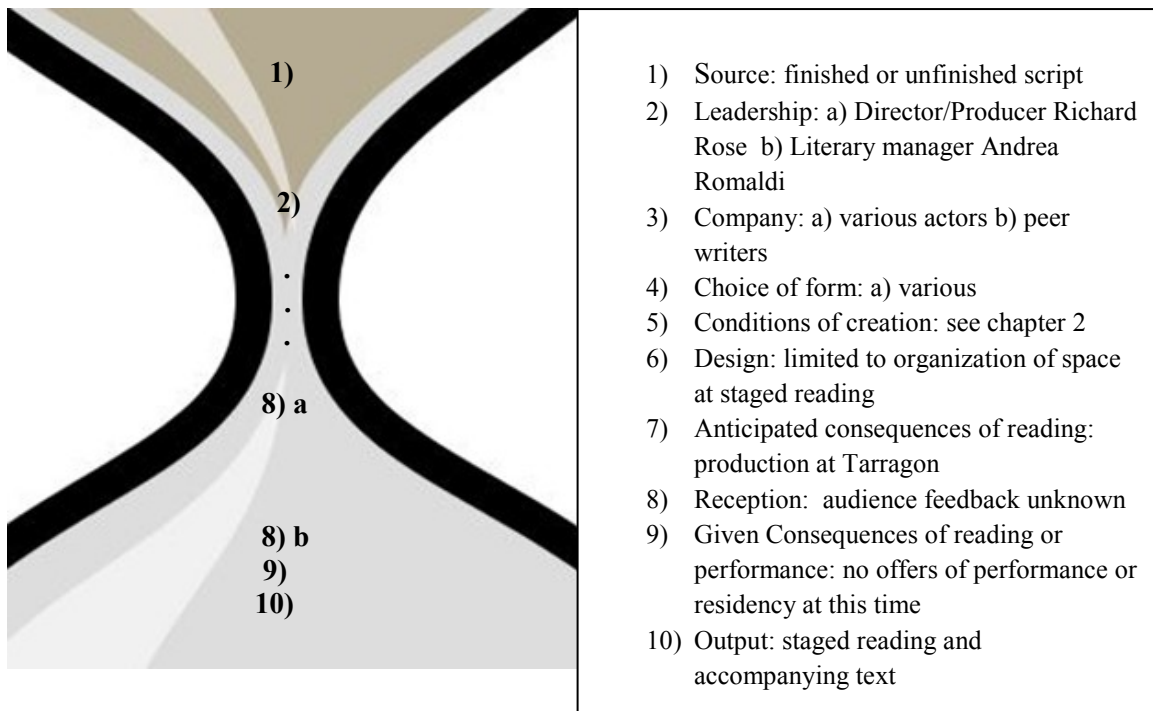
theatre practice is contingent on factors such as individual personalities and abilities that are never entirely predictable or reproducible. Nonetheless, as a tool for analysis, perhaps for self-reflection or planning in anticipation of a play development process, the hourglass has demonstrated its effectiveness in relation to three very different case studies.

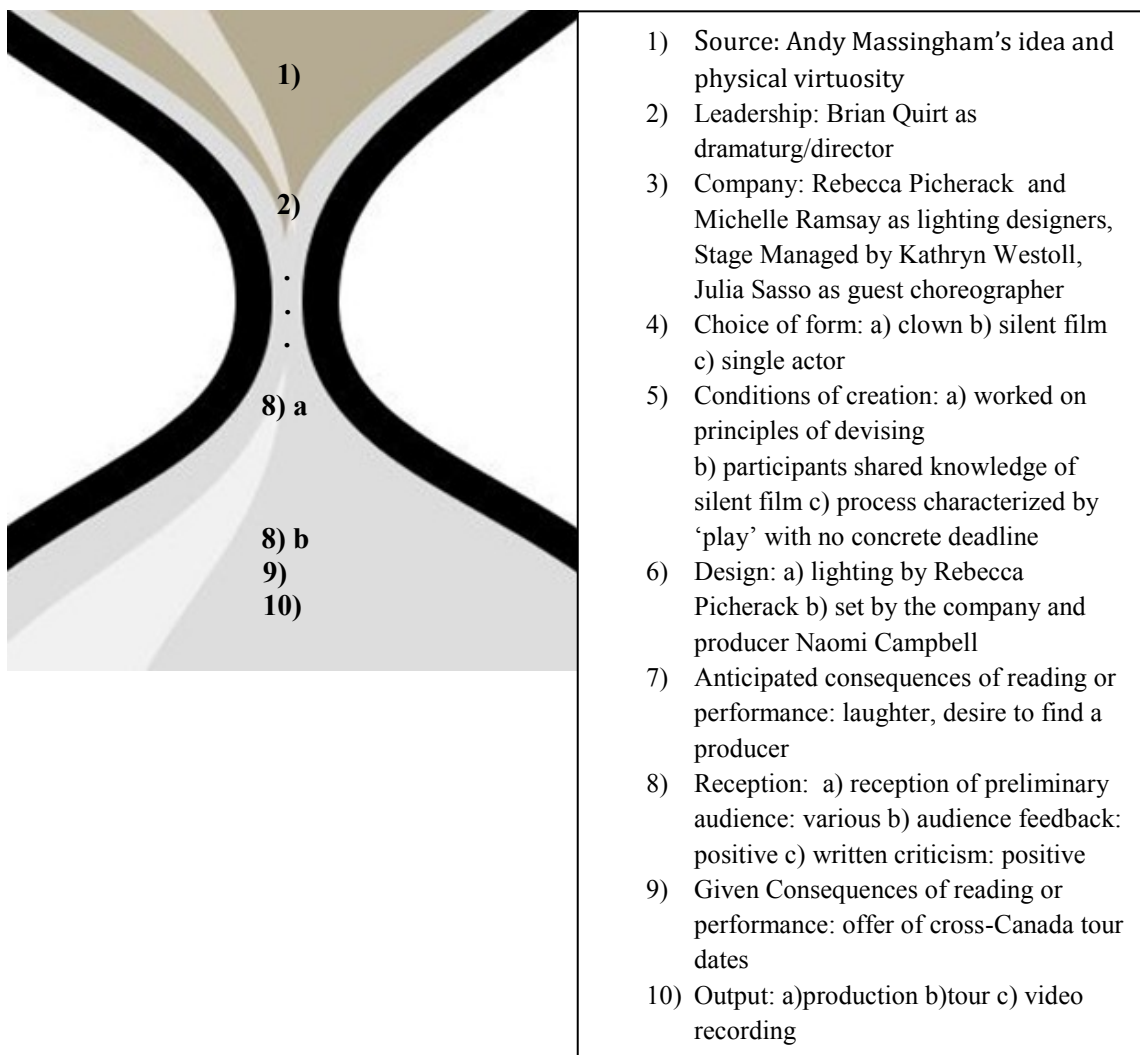
Appendix: Figure 1

Appendix: Figure 2: *Whispering Pines*



Appendix: Figure 3: Tarragon Playwrights Unit



Appendix: Figure 4: *Rough House*

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Workshops

Play Development Workshops: Tarragon Theatre

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