Game Dramaturgy:

A thought experiment on the integration of the theatre dramaturge in the videogame design process.

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Ch. 1 Games And Dramaturgy

1.1 Personal Background and Research Question

I like games. Boardgames, video games, card games, sports, all the way up to debate tactics and beating my own records in "O.C.D.-esque" habits like naming as many guest characters on a certain comedy show as possible within a minute; pretty much the whole spectrum of connotations that come with the word. So then why am I writing a Master thesis in the Theater Studies program? Well, I'm glad I asked... me.

First of all there is a personal motivation. Before I attended the *Theater Studies* program I graduated from the *Design for Virtual Theater and Games* program at the Utrecht School of the Arts. It was a program that challenged the students to think about the potential for combining elements and techniques from both theater making and game making, ranging from 3d CGI graphics making to drama writing. What ended up making the greatest impression on me during that time was a course on dramaturgy. The idea of a creative partner working from a media theoretical basis seemed like a great idea to me for any artistic process, and ever since I have started to study ludology and other theory on games and game design.

It has always been problematic for me however to describe the use of knowledge about game(design) theory for game design purposes, other than the argument that a more thorough understanding a medium could help with making better creative choices when working in it. But a good description of how such a symbiosis might actually work always seemed to lack in my explanations. Therefore I decided to attend the Utrecht University's *Theater Studies* MA Program to learn more about dramaturgy and the relationship between theory and practice as it has developed for over the last 2000 years in the theater. The course of events during my years spent at the university in the end led me to the topic of this thesis, which is about the integration of an active account for media theory (especially game design theory) in the game development process, centered around the notion of the dramaturge. My research question thus is as follows:

How can the notion of a dramaturge as it exists in the theatre, be adapted in order to be an asset within the environment of the game development process?

1.2 Academic motivation

Next to my personal motivation there is of course an academic motivation. There exists a gap between game design theory and game design practice, although it is not often explicitly mentioned.

In all honesty, it was difficult for me to even find explicit mentions of the "gap between theory and practice"(Manninen, 2002: 155) (Wolf and Perron, 2003: 17) in game design as such, although it is not difficult at all to find implied references to it. Eric Zimmerman's following remarks in the context of the game-story in his article *Narrative, Interactivity, Play and Games: Four Naughty Concepts in Need of Discipline* (Zimmerman, 2004) are loud and clear on the matter for one:

> […] as much as we seem enamored by the possibilities of digital media, we seem just as soundly dissatisfied with its current state. Lurking just below the surface of most of the chapters of this volume is one sort of frustration or another: frustration with the lack of cultural sophistication in the gaming industry; frustration with the limitations of current technology; frustration with a lack of critical theory for understanding the medium. (Zimmerman, 2004: 154)

While this particular quote is made in the context of Eric Zimmerman's interest in in the game-story, ludologists seem equally frustrated with the lack of existence of gameplay oriented critical theory and research. For example, in his article: *Towards Computer Game Studies* (Esklinen, 2004), Markku Esklinen seems to suggest that the focus on the game narrative, while falling short to provide insights on gameplay, has stalled productive and necessary ludological efforts. I think it is fair to say that the gap between theory and practice can be felt across the entire academic gaming landscape, no matter who exactly is to blame for it.

As the academic world fails to provide the necessary critical theory for understanding the medium, the industry seems to show little interest in the efforts that have been made, and rather focus on technological innovation, which often simply translates to better graphics. In all fairness, I should mention that paradigms on artificial intelligence actually seem to have penetrated the game industry's, journalist's and player's awareness. Both in the narratological sense (think of the attention that has been given to a game like BLACK AND WHITE (2001), or PROJECT MILO (unreleased) as *Kinect*'s original AI poster child) and the ludological sense (The progress of bots and other manners in which AI can substitute human opponents). It is not hard to imagine though how the phrase, "even better AI" sounds catchier than "based on Brechtian epic principles" or "constructed with the latest ludological insights on emergent systems", and while I support efforts in AI research and loudly applaud the recognition it has acquired, I do not believe it is the solution to every game design issue out there.

There sometimes seems to be an idea that if only Artificial Intelligence can master a certain level of complexity, we can populate open ended virtual worlds with intelligent beings, and that the computer could become a sort of roleplaying gamemaster for our sake. To achieve that end, we

need not only make tremendous leaps forward in the field of AI as such, but we would have to teach the AI about composition, aesthetics, sign systems and so on. And to be able to teach the AI about it, we first of all need to know more about it ourselves. The good thing is that this knowledge could already help in understanding games far before we reach the aforementioned level of AI complexity.

In the theatre, the interrelation of sign systems, a performance's composition and the study of the medium's aesthetics are sometimes referred to with the term dramaturgy. Obviously though, the theatre is quite different from gaming, especially videogaming. Therefore, I would like to adapt the concept of dramaturgy, and appropriate it to the needs of the game development process.

1.3 Academic Position

Before getting into the next chapter I would like to take the opportunity to clarify some things beforehand, in order to avoid confusion later on. First I would like to discuss my academic position so you can see where I'm coming from throughout this thesis.

I am essentially a postmodernist with structuralist tendencies, American structuralism over European structuralism, but structuralism nonetheless. I do not seek universal truth, but I love schema's, models and clear-cut definitions, even if they don't reflect reality 100%. I believe that models are models because they are simplifications for the purpose of overview, and not necessarily a good description of reality, if there is such a thing in the first place. Science and philosophy are tools for thought and conceptualization to at least in the long run solve practical problems. I say "in the long run" because also non-applied theory can give birth to necessary applied theory through paradigm creations and shifts, having served their purpose in that way.

As you will notice, my ideas on dramaturgy are a direct consequence of my position on academic discourse and my multimedial and.intermedial interests. I am not looking for some deep seeded truth when describing dramaturgy. I am looking at what makes it different from associated terms like creativity and directing and the dramaturge as a person; definition by exclusion if you will. Also I try to look at what it is apart from the theatre. Of course dramaturgy and especially production dramaturgy comes forth directly from the theatre. But if there is something in the theatre, that exists in it's creative process, which is creative as well as intellectual, then something alike must be able to exist in other creative processes as well, and therefore, have non-media specific qualities and raison-d'êtres.

Another thing I would like to get out of the way is the manner in which I use the word aesthetics. Aesthetics is a word often used in terms of visual aesthetics or criteria for beauty. Frank Lantz recognizes this in his foreword for *Rules of Play* (Lantz, 2004)

> One of the implications of Rules of Play's approach to it's subject is that the proper way to understand games is from an aesthetic perspective, in the same way that we address fields such as architecture literature or film. This should not be confused with the domain of visual aesthetics, which is simply one facet of a game's creative content. Like film which uses dramatic storytelling, visual composition, sound design, and the complex dynamic organizational process of editing in the construction of a single work, the field of game design has it's own unique aesthetic.(Lantz, 2004: x)

While I agree with the general message in this quote, I would phrase it myself as such: "game design is subject to it's own aesthetic operations". Aesthetic operations is a term I use to describe the media-specific vocabulary used for the communication between media texts and their readers. Although I don't want to make too big an issue out of this one word, I would like to mention two of Martin Seel's thoughts on aesthetics as paraphrased by Chiel Kattenbelt in his 1994 article: *The Triad of Emotion, Action and Reflection: A Sign-Pragmatic Approach to Aesthetic Communication* (Kattenbelt, 1994) (even if the way in which I use the term aesthetics doesn't correspond to his description entirely). First of all, I agree with his statement that aesthetic communication refers to an interest in presenting experience qualities so that others may experience the actuality and internal constitution of one's own experience.(Seel ctd. in: Kattenbelt 2004: 6) Even though I think this is somewhat of an ideal interpretation, as I believe artists sometimes just stumble on effects that are essentially cool but have nothing to do with some sort of authentic "own" experience. The idea of thinking of aesthetics in terms of making experiences accessible (how I wish "experiencable" was an actual word) is actually very politically strategic for game enthusiasts in academically positioning the medium as artistically worthwhile (which would also be in line with the gamedramaturge's agenda I'd say). Experience is a word that is very much integrated in both popular and academic game vocabulary. In their interactive setup, games actively make you experience an experience; it is the medium's primordial language if you will. If aesthetics is about making experiences accessible, games could be looked at as an aesthetic medium pur sang, because they use the language of experience for making these experiences accessible.

Secondly, I also agree that an aesthetic orientation concerns a reflexive orientation towards one's own subjectivity within the context of a presupposed commonality in the life experiences of contemporaries who belong to the same lifeworld. (Seel ctd. in:Ibid.: 6) This means not just that a medium's aesthetic operations should be regarded as temporally and culturally specific, but it derivatively implies an aesthetic orientation to operate from a couple of presuppositions about those specific circumstances. Paradoxically, dramaturge's generally have some reservations about making presuppositions about audience interpretations, which is an issue I will address later on in this essay.

As a side note, it might be noteworthy however that worldwide game releases have to cater to the aesthetic needs of both Western and Eastern consumers, making it very plausible that the culturally specific aesthetic operations might have blurred somewhat in gaming, the past decade or so. I do not want to make an actual issue out of this though, so let's take that thought for what it is, a mere suggestion.

Lastly I would like to discuss the nature of this text. While I certainly don't foster any illusions about the reach of this essay in terms of changing the nature of a billion dollar industry, I do hold strong feelings about the possible added value of the game dramaturge to the creative process of game development. As such, I will most likely be unable to avoid coming across argumentative, if not opinionated at sometimes. There is a poorly concealed tendentious component present in this essay I want to be transparent about, as is the case all the other topics of this paragraph.

1.4 Overview Of The Thesis

In the next chapter I will elaborate on the term dramaturgy. What different meanings does the word entail and how will I use it for the remainder of this essay? *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Turner and Behrndt, 2008) by Turner and Behrndt will serve as a basic source of information for discourse on dramaturgy in this effort. While this thesis is not about defining universal or personal truths about dramaturgy, this whole chapter will function as a set up for later on, so we will have clear perspectives on dramaturgical activities that can be used for a translation of the concept from one medium to the other.

In chapter three I will look at some key differences between the media at stake. Games and the theatre differ notably from one and other in terms of ontology, production and culture, and before making the step from the theatre towards games it is important to be aware of these

differences because they could have an effect on the manner in which a dramaturge might operate within them.

Then in chapter four I will take a look at the actual game development process and try to position dramaturgical practice in it's context. Considering the media comparative differences of chapter three, and the categories of dramaturgical practice as defined in chapter two, I will look at both the stages of development, as well as the constellation of the development team to find potential contributions the dramaturge could make to the process. This is the chapter in which all former findings converge in an effort to answer the main research question. Tracy Fullerton et. al. have constructed a very useful overview of the game development process' general characteristics in their book *Game Design Workshop, Designing Prototyping and Playtesting* (Fullerton et. al., 2004) which I will use as a main guideline in this effort.

Ch. 2 The Dramaturge: Theory And Practice

2.1.1 Dramaturgy And It's Several Meanings

Dramaturgy is a difficult term to grasp. To get some grip on the term, I will use Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt's book *Dramaturgy and Performance*(Turner and Behrndt, 2008), in which they explore the term and discourse surrounding it both clearly and thoroughly, as my main point of reference for this chapter. The first line on the back of the book reads:

> The concept of dramaturgy and the practice of the dramaturg. Although inextricably linked, are
> independent terms and in this accessible introduction, Turner and Behrndt explore dramaturgy as
> both a critical concept and a practical process. (Ibid.)

The main reason that this book will play such a large part in this chapter is that I also work from the assumption of an inextricable link between the concept of dramaturgy and the activities of the dramaturge. I myself though would phrase it as the concept of dramaturgy actually being the inextricable link between the activities of the dramaturge and the relation between the structure and experience of a text (any sort of aesthetic text actually, but in the theatre it could refer to both the drama text and a performance). But even when both meanings are clearly distinguished from one and other, there are many different perspectives on the relation between text structure and experience, and on what is considered a dramaturgical task. As seen in the discourse analysis in *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Ibid.), several accounts for dramaturgy as a concept include:

> -the dialogic relationship between what is being presented, and how it is presented […] about
> joining form and content in a work. (Frish ctd. in: Ibid.: 25)
> -a complex network of actions […] all the elements of the performance that 'work directly on the
> audience's attention, on their understanding, their emotiveness, their synaesthesia'. (Barba qtd. in:
> Ibid.: 31)
> -an 'assemblage', the process or 'ordering or patterning the different elements into a performance
> structure. (Pearson and Shanks ctd. in: Ibid.: 31-32)
> -the links that exist in the chain of elements of dramatic action. (Korish qtd. in: Ibid.: 33)

Why I prefer to think of it as the relation between a text's structure and experience I'll explain a bit further on but as you can see, even when considered apart from dramaturgical practice, dramaturgy is not a word without ambiguity.

The same goes when the focus actually is on the dramaturge's activities. Bart Dieho's effort to discuss perspectives on dramaturgical tasks leads to a mere two and a half pages (Dieho, 2009: 55-58) he needs to go over all of the findings on the tasks of the dramaturge according to research by Celine Buren et Al. Constructed in their research: *Dramatologie? Een onderzoek naar dramaturgie in de beroepspraktijk* (Buren et. Al, 2005.). The list of tasks without any context is not short either and is as follows:

> subsidieaanvraag schrijven, voorstelling structureren (montage), speelplan maken, vormgevingsideeën aandragen, toneeltekst analyseren , fungeren als eerste kijker, nieuwe teksten zoeken, feedback aan de regisseur, feedback aan de spelers, teksten voor het repertoire uitkiezen, vertalen of bewerken van teksten, begeleiden van spelers, teksten schrijven, programmaboekje schrijven, een schrijver of vertaler begeleiden, inleiding of nagesprek houden bij een voorstelling, concept voor een voorstelling bedenken, educatie voor scholen, onderzoek naar opvoeringsgeschiedenis van een tekst, ontwikkelen van beleid voor het gezelschap, casten van de rollen, op de hoogte blijven van het cultuurbeleid, informatie over schrijver en culturele en historische context van een tekst verzamelen. (Ibid.: 4)

Of course, there is no distinction made between the tasks of a desk dramaturge (like keeping informed about the governments culture policy) and a floor dramaturge (like giving feedback tot the director). Since this thesis is primarily aimed on the creative process, the tasks of a floor dramaturge shall be the main point of consedration in this essay.

2.1.2 Criteria For A Definition of Dramaturgy.

With such a diverse collection of interpretations of the term dramaturgy I thought it might be productive to define my own perspective on the word, in accordance with some criteria that are important in the context of this essay. One criterion for my perspective on dramaturgy is that it should be process oriented. In the end, I am not just comparing two different media, but also their respective creative processes. For the purposes of this paper, my perspective on not just dramaturgy as dramaturical practice, but also as a concept, should be inextricably related to the creative process (of any medium) in order to meaningfully reflect on the subject matter.

Perhaps even more importantly, neither my explanation of dramaturgy as a dramaturge's practice, nor as a text's structure and experience relation, can be media specific. If I don't look at the attributes and skills of a dramaturge apart from the theatre, I obviously can't discuss her in the

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context of a game design process. The same thing goes for dramaturgy as a concept, as is made clear by the following remarks made by Richard Wages and Alexander Hornung, made in 2005 at the 11th International Conference on Virtual Systems and Multimedia in Ghent Belgium (Wages and Hornung, 2005):

> Compared to classic media like movies or theatre, interactive digital productions in the field of entertainment computing like VR environments and computer games are typically lacking sophistication in their dramaturgic arrangement. While hardware and network technologies are rapidly gaining quality and speed, we cannot observe remarkable improvements in the ability of interactive productions and formats to create empathy. Classical dramaturgic methods for the presentation of conflicts or dramatic situations frequently fail in interactive environments. Often, dramaturgy and interactivity are hence labelled as contradicting concepts. […] Regarding a simple application of classical dramaturgies to interactive formats – particularly within digital media – we can definitely agree with such a claim. Due to the fact that in a running digital scenario a steering factor like an actor, a director, a moderator or a conductor is always missing, the absolute control of the author is destroyed by the interactivity of the user. Dramaturgies in their classical application will thus fail. This may be however no reason to regard the employment of dramaturgically effective methods for interactive scenarios as doomed to failure. (Wages and Hornung, 2005)

The word "classical" is essential in the argument above. Any rules associated with classical dramaturgy as such, be they Aristotle's contemplations in *Poetics* (Aristotle, Trans: Heath. 1996), Neoclassical ideals like verisimilitude and the three Unity's (Brockett, Hildy, 2003: 161-163), or the Hollywood movie format (Thompson, Bordwell, 2002: 40-50) tend to fail in an interactive environment. In a somewhat unrelated response to Espen Aarseth's article: *Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation* (Aarseth, 2004), Chris Crawford incidentally provides some insight on the hurdles for translating linear notions of drama to games (Crawford, 2004):

> most games use spatial algorithms that correspond to geometric laws but violate dramatic laws. Characters cannot travel from point A to point B without traversing all the terrain between those two points, no matter how boring that terrain might be. In drama, a character who must travel between two points simply disappears from one location (stage) and reappears at the other. This conforms to dramatic standards, but completely defies all conventions of what we normally think of as simulation. (Crawford, 2004: 46)

The different conventions in editing between games and linear drama due to the player's embodiment with a character on the level of the fabula is of course a very narrativistic example but

I like to think it gets the point across. I'd like to make clear however, that while classical dramaturgical presentations tend to fail in interactive environments, I don't want to distance myself from what can be referred to as classical dramaturgy as a method entirely. While I am certainly opposed to prescriptions, dogma's and ideals, I am not opposed to uncovering patterns and investigating "rules" in the descriptive (not prescriptive) sense of the word. It would be easy to just point to my structuralist tendencies here, but I also think that an effort for investigating descriptive rules adheres to the needs of the game development process, as we will see throughout this thesis.

So my perspective on dramaturgy will have to be oriented at the creative process, non-media specific, and while negating linear "classical" prescriptive notions of dramaturgy, should not exclude the notion of investigating descriptive rules. Incidentally, by arguing that both media are aesthetic media (as I do), I am also implying that my perspective on dramaturgy should be able to deal with aesthetic texts (which it will). I'd like to start with explaining my perspective on dramaturgy as a concept. It will serve as an underlying idea for my perspectives on dramaturgical activities. Those perspectives on dramaturgical practice are based on insights gained during a literature study and an internship I did beforehand, also both oriented at investigating game dramaturgy. I have updated those perspective since then and appropriated them for the context of this essay.

2.2.1 A Non-Media Specific Perspective On Dramaturgy As A Relation Between Text Structure And Experience.

There are several issues I have with the aforementioned descriptions of dramaturgy as a concept cited in *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Turner and Behrndt, 2008) in the context of this essay, making me prefer thinking about it as a relation between text structure and performance. First of all, most of them seem to exclude the audience's experience. I can't afford not to include audience experience while arguing in the context of aesthetics as explained in the previous chapter. More importantly though, most of them explain "composition" to be interchangeable with dramaturgy (although they use synonyms for composition like assemblage, network, or the form-content relation). Why would we want to use a controversial and vague term as a mere substitute for perfectly well defined words? For this reason, when I try to describe dramaturgy, I would like to explicitly distinguish it from the term composition.

Another term often recurring in discourse on dramaturgy as a way to relate performance structure to experience is the term "concept" (think of the term: dramaturgical concept for example). I want to add this term to the mix because I believe that dramaturgy is what happens

between a concept and its structure. I believe that these three terms; concept, dramaturgy and composition, are related circularly, and together describe a way to look at the creative process of aesthetic media text production.

In spite of Wikipedia's frowned upon low academic status, I like to think of concepts the way it is described there as a cognitive unit of meaning[1]; any type or sort of meaning. It could be an artistic concept, which in itself indeed often is a starting point for a creative process, but it could also be a style, paradigm, genre or any other type of plan or idea. At the risk of stating the obvious; from a semiotic standpoint signs bear meaning. From that premise I assume that the sign systems of an aesthetic text act as structures for the communication of meaning. The communication of meaning through these structures includes both the acts of transmission and interpretation. In the context of aesthetic communication, this means that a concept can be (and most likely is) a cognitive starting point for a creative text, but also a cognitive unit of meaning that can be interpreted from a creative text in performance. As a starting point in an iterative creative process, it can be looked at as an idea, message or artistic wish of an artist. As an interpretation it can be a theme, a personal interpretation, preferred reading or perhaps even "just a feeling".

Dramaturgy tells us something about the aesthetic operations of a concept. Within a given concept, signs signify in a certain way. Tragic death creates a different experience in a dark comedy than it does in a romantic drama. A kitchen chair creates a different experience in Realistic scenography than it does on a nearly empty stage with a red carpet leading up to it. Dim lighting signifies differently when referred to as "night" than when referred to as "the attic". It also works in other aesthetic media; a yellow circle makes for a different experience in a geometric abstract painting than it does in a realistic painting of the sky and clouds. A punch to the face has different meaning in a soccer match than it does in a boxing match. Etcetera.

While dramaturgy tells us something about the aesthetic operations of concept, it is commonly associated inextricably with a sense of potentiality and possibility, and as such I agree that it should not be looked at as a steady set of prescriptive aesthetic rules. Instead, I argue to look at dramaturgy as a collection of possible ways in which sign systems could(!) operate in an actual instantiation of the concept (ergo a composition). Or as Maaike Bleeker more eloquently says:

> If dramaturgy is about rules and conventions at all, it is not about applying or following them, but
> about becoming aware of them as they guide making performances as well as looking at them. It is
> about allowing all of these activities to operate self-reflexively. (Bleeker, 2003: 166)

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1 Wikipedia. Concept. on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept

I would argue though that the more specific the concept, the more specific (and smaller) the collection of possibilities for aesthetic operations within an instance of that concept is. I think that the dramaturgy of ancient Greek drama in it's entirety is less specific then the dramaturgy of a specific ancient Greek play.

Where the dramaturgy of a concept is a collection of possible aesthetic operations of signs, composition refers to a specific way in which different sign systems and individual signs interrelate in an instantiation of that concept. Of course, the composition and the dramaturgy of a text are closely related in the sense that both the relative position of a sign, as well as the manner in which it signifies define what is actually signified by that sign.

Note by the way that the composition is not necessarily a reference to a finished text, also a performance in early rehearsal stages, or a painting with only a few strokes, has a certain composition at a specific point. Even if meant as an artistic experiment, the experiment does have a specific composition at that point in the process. Every specific structure of aesthetic elements is a composition, even if it isn't the final or aspired one.

2.2.2 Dramaturgy And The Iterative Creative Process

Where my interpretation of dramaturgy at first glance differs entirely from developments and dominant paradigms on dramaturgy and the theatre as an artistic medium of the last twenty years, is that it seems to be a direct and somewhat static consequence of the artistic concept. In terms of artistic practice, the development of dramaturgy beyond being a static derivative of a concept is well accounted for (Ibid: 164-165), and in terms of a structure and experience relation many professional contemporary dramaturge's seem to speak of dramaturgy in terms of movement and dynamics (Ibid.: 163). Even just from a post-structuralist perspective my idea of dramaturgy as a static set of rules derived from the concept might seem way too logocentric.

I would like to stipulate though that I consider the terms concept, dramaturgy and composition to be related circularly and that a concept is also an interpretive product of a composition. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for example projects the concepts of forbidden love, aristocratic rivalry and Elizabethan drama. Of course not every composition made in for example early rehearsals projects concepts as clearly defined or dominant as the aforementioned concepts of Shakespeare's famous tragic drama text, but some cognitive unit of meaning will be projected by every composition.

As a result of this circular relation, I argue that my theoretical interpretation of dramaturgy does not exclude a dynamic experience of dramaturgy within the iterative nature of the creative

process. My interpretation of dramaturgy is also dynamic and mobile, and it is even quite explicit in relating that mobility to the creative process, which as I said, is important in the context of this essay. Also, while the word "collection" does indeed refer to a finite set of possibilities for aesthetic communication, the implied limit is a mainly theoretical one as the result of the cross referencing of many, many, variables. In other words, while I do believe there is a theoretical limit of dramaturgical possibilities per concept, not even a fraction of their totality can be examined during a creative process, let alone during the appropriate single iteration of one. And lastly, creative processes that revolve around just one concept would be quite rare, if not non-existent. For all of these reasons, the theoretical static character of my interpretation of dramaturgy as a noun, would not ever actually be experienced when "doing" dramaturgy as a verb.

If I had to bring it down to one sentence, I would say that dramaturgy is a collection of possible aesthetic operations that can be used in a concept to create a composition. This definition is not dependent on the theatre and can be contextualised in other aspects of creative processes in general. I now want to look at how this definition relates to my non media-specific perspectives on the dramaturge's activities.

2.3.1 The Dramaturge As An Active Mirror

One often mentioned and generally accepted task of the modern day dramaturge is being the active mirror in a creative process (Buren, 2005: 6) (Bleeker, 2003: 169), reflecting back at the director (and other creatives) that which a performance communicates at a certain stage of production during rehearsals. Sometimes, this particular role of the dramaturge is elevated to that of "first audience member", implying not just reflecting back what is communicated, but making an either implied or explicated judgement about the audience. Although this latter role is much contested, by both philosophical rejections of objective points of view and preferred readings, or practical objections to generalising a pluriform audience, the role seems to be more clearly present for dramaturges in the children's theatre or other theatre forms that address very specific audiences (based on culture, ethnicity, sex, age, health etc.), often making either deliberate or subconscious judgements about their audience's subject position and generalising them in the process.

Dramaturgy allows the dramaturge to effectively contextualize her experiences in the current composition. Being trained in recognizing aesthetic operations helps the dramaturge in pinpointing exactly what it is that brings about a certain feeling or experience. The dramaturge is also in a good position to notice unforeseen changes and confirm expected changes in the aesthetic operations due to a (series of) change(s) in the composition. Dependent upon how active of a mirror the dramaturge

actually is, she can report back specifically according to the directors instructions or make her own judgements about what is important to stipulate. Also, she can range in level of activeness by merely relating experiences, expressing to what compositional elements these experiences are related, or disclosing insights about the associated aesthetic operations.

2.3.2 The Dramaturge As A Relay Between Theory And Practice.

Historically the dramaturge has acted as a relay between the creative and theoretical (or philosophical) aspects of the theatre, both by attempting to improve theatre practice through critical reflection and using actual theatre making experiences to contribute to the theoretical corpus on the theatre (and/or drama). Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who could be regarded as one of the forerunners of the modern day dramaturge (Turner and Behrndt, 2008: 19), wrote extensive critical papers on the (then) future of the German theatre. Bertold Brecht who is generally claimed to be the first production dramaturge used his experiences as both a writer and a director to create a large collection of theoretical works on the theatre. (Ibid.: 38)

These days, dramaturges also tend to do a lot of pre-research, researching for example historical or geographical aspects of the dramatic content, a play's performance history or the cultural environment of the venue. They also tend to be academically educated and often write critical essays on the theatre and their experiences in creative processes either educationally or journalistic. (Dieho, 2009: 26, 56)

Essentially, when dramaturge's write about the theatre they contribute to a common understanding of the theatre. This common understanding, whether it is about aesthetics, the creative process, performance history or any other useful topic, is in turn used by them and other dramaturges as a contextual point of reference in their future practice-based endeavours. Of course, one can also learn a lot about such topics through participation in theatre practice alone, and it could be argued (as has been many times in history) that first hand experience is the superior of theoretical wisdom. First hand experience is a time costly process though, and sometimes theoretical knowledge can suffice in preventing from having to reinvent the wheel.

Dramaturge's do differ in training. While there are many dramaturge's these days with an academic background, many also have been schooled as playwrights, directors, choreographers and sometimes even stage designers or cinema-related crafts. Furthermore, dramaturgic interdisciplinarity has been a reality since Lessing's era. (Ibid: 26) Ivo van Hove, from Toneelgroep Amsterdam works with several dramaturges for different parts of the process. One dramaturge, called Peter van Kraaij started out as a film-director while the other, Bart Van den Eynde, is a

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classically schooled dramaturge. So also the background dramaturges draw on for their intellectual input is not unambiguous.(Kuin et. al. 2009)

Also there are different ways in which dramaturge's rely on their background (whatever that background is) in terms of knowledge and skills. Annemarie Wenzel distinguishes several manners in which dramaturge's relate their background to their practice-based activities, ranging from a claiming broad sociocultural and philosophical awareness, to having adopted a general academic critical attitude, to relying on a sound knowledge on aesthetic theory. (Wenzel, 2004)

2.4.3 The Dramaturge As A Creative Contributer.

Not all dramaturges "just reflect" and not all directors want them to do merely this. It is not unheard of for dramaturges to get involved in the creative process more actively and make creative suggestions. Maaike Bleeker offers an interesting perspective for looking at dramaturgical input as a mode of looking:

> For although the dramaturg may represent the "other" within a working process, he or she is an involved other. He or she is not only an analytical, intellectual eye from the outside, but also a body who thinks along with the director or choreographer-that is, as a collaborator who moves along with him or her in a movement that involves both closeness and distance, both similarity and difference. I propose to understand this collaborative movement in terms of an interaction between two different modes of looking. With this notion of dramaturgy as a mode of looking, I argue against the idea that dramaturgy is some independent aspect of a work or, even worse, something applied to a work. [...] Seen this way, the dramaturgy of a particular work is inseparable from the work; it is the work seen from a particular point of view. The director or choreographer herself or himself can look at her or his own work from a dramaturgical point of view as well, and, no doubt, at times she or he will do so. It can also be productive to ask somebody else to take this position in the creative process in order to open up the possibility for a dialogue. Here, concepts can function as a meeting ground in the working process. (Bleeker, 2003: 163, 164)

Inspired by Bleeker's notion of dramaturgy as a mode of looking, I came to understand the practise of dramaturgy as a mode of creative thinking, or even creativity that differs from another mode of creativity that is more commonly related to words like creativity, the artistic and aesthetics.

This dramaturgical mode of creativity distinguishes itself from what I like to call a directional mode of creativity in therms of focus and intent. In terms of intent the dramaturgical

mode of creativity isn't concerned with an own creative message or artistic vision, but with the creative message or artistic vision of the creative (e.g. the director).

In terms of focus, the dramaturgical mode of creativity puts a lot of focus on, well, dramaturgy. What I mean by that is that while the directional mode of creativity is concerned with the performance of a composition, and getting to the next iteration of a trial and error process, the dramaturgical mode of creativity focuses on getting a good grip on the aesthetic operations that are important in the process at hand. More than merely reflecting like the active mirror, this dramaturgical mode of creativity can be actively used as a manner of artistic contribution and to make creative suggestions by accordance of the insights gained through focus on the current essential aesthetic operations.

The directional versus dramaturgical distinction I make here, is of course merely theoretical and a rather black and white one at that. In reality any adopted creative demeanour would range on a grey scale, and one need not necessarily be a dramaturge to adopt a more dramaturgical mode of creativity. Sometimes, the aesthetic operations of the medium can even be the central concept of an artistic endeavour like in meta theatre. In this case the line becomes even more blurred, because the directional mode of creativity is also directly concerned with the aesthetic operations. In any case I would repeat Bleeker's assertion, that it can be productive to bring a dramaturge into the creative process as a creative partner, to open up room for dialogue.(Ibid. 2003: 166)

Ch. 3 Relevant Differences Between Making Theatre And Games

3.1 Categorical Overview

There are quite a few important differences between the two media that are worth keeping in mind because of their influence on the media's respective creative process. They are roughly divided into three categories.

-ontological differences
-sociocultural differences
-productional differences

3.2 Ontological Differences

The first difference I want to mention might not be a blatantly obvious one, but goes right at the heart of each of the medium's ontology and reflects an often celebrated tenacious buzzword with which both media are described: Multimediality. For both the theatre and videogames, multimediality is a characteristic aspect, but there are considerable differences in the multimedial sense in which both media operate.

Chiel Kattenbelt rightfully claims that the theatre absorbs other media in it's own manifestation.

> It is in this capacity that I regard teh theatre as a hypermedium. Theatre provides film, television and digital video a stage, that is to say a "performative situation", in which the other media are not just recordings on their own, but at the same time and above all theatrical signs. Operative as part of theatre, the other media become "signs of signs" as opposed to "signs of objects". (Kattenbelt, 2006: 37)

Games, or even cinema, also make use of several other media like sound, text etc. but the theatre displays these media on stage in a performative fashion typical for the theatre's ontology. The consequence is that if a performance does not utilize projection for example, it still exists. The theatre has an open structure that provides for multimedial utilization, but at it's core it can exist by merely having someone (or something) perform before an audience of at least one person.

Games, or more specifically videogames, on the other hand might in part be able to potentially absorb other media in their manifestation, but for a much bigger part than the theatre, are

dependant at a core level on the presence of several other media. Each videogame is fundamentally based on the presence of visual arts, digital media and ludology (games at large).

At it's core, the theatre seems to be much more flexible then videogames and this is reflected in the relative rigidity of the game development process. Anybody can make theatre (I am not saying good theatre per se), because anybody can perform something to an audience. Computer programming however is a very exact skill and without a computer programmer, one cannot make a videogame. Theatre can be performed on an empty stage, but a videogame by definition needs graphics. Theatre can be improvisational and a performance can be made up right on the spot, but videogames by definition need game rules and so on.

I want to stress however that I am not arguing that acting or playwriting are easier or less important skills than computer programming or game design. What I am saying is that at it's core, the theatre is much more flexible in adding and dismissing media without committing ontological suicide. Not only must the show go on, it can go on! This makes for a more flexible artistic process than when making a videogame. Of course, game dramaturges should be thoroughly aware of the consequences this difference has on their position in the process, which will predominantly revolve around having to deal with a much more structured creative process. But we will come back to that later more thoroughly, where it will be discussed in the context of the media's productional circumstances.

Another important difference between the theatre and games is their interactive structure. Again, both the theatre and games are interactive, but in contrast to their multimedial structure, the difference in their interactive structures are quite blatant and obvious. The theatre's interactive structure is a direct consequence of it's multimedial ontology. The aforementioned minimum requirements for a theatrical situation, namely a performer and an audience(member), imply that without the audience a performative situation seizes to exist and turns into a rehearsal or a generic leisure activity. A movie can be projected even if nobody watches, but the theatre is ontologically dependant upon an audience. The performer performs not just to the audience, but because of the audience. There is an implied communicative reciprocity between audience and performer that fundamentally defines a performative (or theatrical) situation. Therefore, one can say, that fundamentally, where there is theatre, there is interaction. Hence the theatre is interactive.

While in games the presence of interactivity is not more fundamental or important, it is much more influential and visible. This is because games don't just address the audience (i.e. player), but rely upon it's input for continuation. Of course I won't deny that actors might be energized by it's audience input, but even a totally silent audience is still an audience. A game needs a players input though. It won't progress without it. It cannot be beaten without the players effort.

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This fundamentally defines the differences between dramatic structures of the respective media at a core level, and that is very important for a dramaturge to keep in mind when reflecting on choices made in the creative process. For example, a player cannot be confused too much, for (s)he will lose control and perhaps even interest on how and if to go on with the game.

> If you shoot an astroid while playing a computer game and the astroid does not change in any way, you are not going to know if you actually hit it or not. If you do not receive feedback that indicates you're on the right track, the action you took will have very little meaning. (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 35)

More generally put: the subject position of the player cannot be taken into consideration just in the context of communicative reception, but must also be taken in consideration in terms of the player being a (co-)producer of the text in performance. His/her subject position in relation to the text does not just define the way she interprets the text, but also what she will do next (if anything at all). This is a very visible consequence of the differences in the media's interactive structure: you don't get a joystick when visiting a theatre performance!

The last ontological difference between theatre and games I want to address is their level of mediation. The theatre is very direct in the manner in which it involves direct communication with people on productional as well as performative levels. In videogames digitality complicates direct human communication. This is symptomized once again in for example the creative processes. In the theatre one can easily make adjustments during rehearsal or after try-outs, while in videogames entire beta-pipelines ranging from game designers to programmers are concerned when making adjustments, which makes experimentation a lot more production intensive. I will come back to this in the next chapter but obviously this means that the dramaturge should perhaps be even more diligent in coordinating her efforts with the flow of the process than in the theatre. More importantly though, from an ontological point of view, the interfaced character of games can provide for objective data to study.

Part of the subjective gameplay experience is created by the objective parameters of the interface. In Streetfighter(1987) Ryu is slower than Ken, but does more damage on hit. And Ken will always be faster then Ryu. Game, after game, after game, after game. Although the experience of individual players might differ, all of their testimonies about their experiences can be related back to objective data. To stay within the example, when researching player experiences in Streetfighter, game dramaturge's should know all characters moves, their hit-box parameters, the

move's frame duration etc. Discerning the objective parameters from the subjective ones, and considering how they relate and respond to one and other, could be productive for a game dramaturge because it would enable her to frame playtesters' testimonies in the developer's language. So when playtesters would report that a specific character was too poor on offence and was put in a perpetual defensive position, the dramaturge could discuss this with the developers in terms of the speed or range of the character. And if nothing else, it's always nice if everyone's on the same page right?

3.3 Sociocultural Differences

Next to the ontological differences there are also some sociocultural differences to keep in mind for the investigation of game dramaturgy. First of all let's discuss the historical points.

The theatre has been around for four and a half millennia, and theoretical criticism on the theatre dates back to Aristotle's *Poetics* from about two to two and a half thousand years ago. (Aristotle, Trans: Heath. 1996.) Videogames however have been around for a good 50 to 60 years (depending on what is considered the first videogame) and the widespread commercial form we are familiar with these days have only been there for an even shorter amount of time. The consequence is that where a theatre dramaturge inherently draws on over two centuries of of aesthetic criticism, a game dramaturge couldn't enjoy that same luxury.

Again, I want to be abundantly clear about not suggesting that dramaturges attend rehearsals with their copies of *Poetics* or some of the works of Fischer Lichte in hand, in order to magically heal any compositional errors in a performance. The aesthetic "rules" of the theatre in general, and drama specifically, however, are embedded in our society at large and the theatre connoisseurs especially, to an extent that games just don't. Granted that postmodernism and postdramatism for a large part try to negate these aesthetic rules, but that does mean that there actually is a theoretical point of reference to distance oneself from. Radical postdramatic theatre makers know exactly what to negate! And the common knowledge, sense and conscience about the theatre's aesthetic operations provides for room for an intellectual and conscientious approach to those negations in the first place.

Of course I would not claim that theatre dramaturges limit themselves to theatre theory or should do so. There are for example theatre dramaturges with a cinematographic background (Kuin et. al. 2009) and some theatrical techniques like montage are derived from film and TV. Also a lot of meta theatre relates the theatre to other media forms in a critical manner. In lieu of the theatre

dramaturge's open demeanor to theory on different media, the fact remains that the corpus on videogame aesthetics is smaller than the corpus on theatre aesthetics, less coherent and based on a much younger tradition. Therefore, for a game dramaturge, not just relying on game design theory is not just a testimony of a rich theoretical background and expanded interest, but somewhat of a necessity.

When looking at other media from a game design theory perspective, of course the theatre itself comes to mind with it's 2000 year old tradition and aforementioned ontological overlaps. But also fields like cinematography and architecture might be useful for theoretical context on camera, montage and level design. Coincidently, an open demeanour to aesthetic theory about different media in general would seem to reflect the current dominant modus of videogames, with very cinematic styles (and I'm not just talking about the cutscenes), immersive environments and somewhat drama-based storytelling systems, clearly very dependant in their aesthetic quality on knowledge about drama, cinematography and architecture. Whether one would like to perfect or negate that modus, such theory could provide yet another set of useful tools for conceptualizing such efforts.

Another point to keep in mind are the cultural circumstances of gaming culture. Consider the following remark by Steven Johnson,

> Game players are not soaking up moral counsel , life lessons, or rich psychological portraits. They are not having emotional experiences with their Xbox, other than the occasional adrenaline rush. The narratives they help create now rival pulp Hollywood fare, which is an accomplishment when measured against the narratives of PacMan and Pong, but it's still setting the bar pretty low. With the occasional exception , the actual content of the game is often childish or gratuitously menacing-though, again, not any more so than your average summer blockbuster.(Johnson, 2005:)

Considering that Steven Johnson is actually arguing in favour of the benefits of gaming and other popular culture in our society, the general consensus seems to be that gaming is still considered lowbrow entertainment culture and more about fun and entertainment than morality and philosophy. This doesn't mean one cannot actually make a morally charged game, but as opposed to a morally charged theatre performance, it will stand out like a sore thumb among it's peers, for better or worse. Also when working with designers and other colleagues in the game-making process, this cultural background is also a part of their identity, which means there might be some resistance among game developers to intellectualising the creative process. This is not in itself very new to the

dramaturge whose position in the theatre has for centuries been a topic of debate (Dieho, 2009: 37). Nevertheless one should be aware of it.

3.4 Productional Circumstances.

Next to the ontological and sociocultural circumstances, the productional circumstances define yet another difference between the theatre and games. In very general terms the theatre can be divided into a commercial segment focused on entertainment and a less commercial and often subsidised segment with a more artistic emphasis. Since the former rarely (if not never) makes use of dramaturges, the latter will be the one we will be focusing on.

Game development processes can generally be divided into three types. First of all there are the big commercial games industry processes whose products one generally comes across in retail stores. Then there is also an up and coming scene of indie games produced by much smaller development teams (sometimes just one person) often distributed digitally. Although this latter one focuses less on commercialism, it still is not heavily subsidised and still tries to reach audiences as large as possible. Lastly, there are the games that are a commercial product in itself, aimed at getting people to visit websites or getting them familiar with brands and products. The last one I won't discuss in this thesis because not only the process, but the communicational operations of the products themselves are influenced by commercial goals. Where the industry games are definitely aimed at large audiences and commercial success, they are still aimed at creating an aesthetic affect, unlike the commercial games which are aimed at creating a commercial effect in itself.

The duration of the creative process in the theatre tends to be shorter than that of the game-making process. Whereas in the theatre, rehearsal times vary from a couple of weeks to about half a year, game development processes take at least half a year with small indie productions up to three or sometimes four years (or even longer) for the triple A titles. Paradoxically, while one might think that a longer creative process would allow the dramaturge more freedom and flexibility, longer processes generally require a stricter timetable, meaning that the dramaturge has to act ad hoc or move on to the next issue in order not to frustrate the process. In a game-making process, this is added to the already mentioned rigidity inherent to the process caused by the necessary expertise in the various disciplines and the relative lack of ability for people of different disciplines to comment on each others work. This might mean that the quality of creative choices are sometimes compromised by productional factors, and a dramaturge has to inform herself on the reason of creative choices to avoid working in vane of managerial realities.

Also, in general, games tend to be more marketing focused than theatre. In the type of theatre that actually employs dramaturges, commercial goals are at best frowned upon and the general attitude towards the audience is not aimed at pleasing but rather cultural elevation or other more artistic goals. This type of theatre is often subsidised or otherwise financed for the sake of cultural preservation and elevation, and these artistic goals are the ones being accounted for towards the "investors", be they the government or private cultural foundations.

In game companies on the other hand investors simply want to make money, and creative choices are being accounted for to the investors, via the marketing people and the producer in terms of profitability. This actually goes as far as the (main) characters' personality , visual style, interactive structure, interface, game options, artificial intelligence and so on. Games are not the safest investments, and most investors in accordance with the publisher will want a game "just like last year's big hit..." […] "only different!" (Crawford, 2003: 105)

Thus in the games industry, a lot of time and money is spent on market research and even the smaller companies that aren't completely indie are still about making profit to stay alive. Maybe they won't spend any money on market research, but they still aim at being original because whether they want to or not, they are competing with other games that are released in the same period (even the big expensive titles), and game journalism generally doesn't beat around the bush. To a certain extent, the market and hypes will also influence creative choices in these smaller companies, be it perhaps not per se the same market as the one in which the bigger titles compete.

This all sounds rather cynical, and to a certain degree that might be true. And while it certainly creates artistic restrictions a game dramaturge must be aware about, it also presents chances for the game dramaturge. As a "first audience" and a researcher, a game dramaturge might be in a great position for accounting for creative choices that might otherwise be done away with. As a co-creator and a researcher, she might be able to give certain necessary commercial creative accents, to artistic choices that otherwise might not make it to the boardroom. One should note that a game dramaturge in this sense would act as an advocate rather than a spin doctor. As said earlier, the player is a central pivot in the creative process, and thus designing with the market in mind is as much a creative concern as it is a commercial. Of course there is a discrepancy between designing with the market in mind and designing for the market, the latter one being favoured by the investors where the former is about procuring aesthetic communication. But not all the ideas that are shot down might not have the potential for commercial success.

3.5 Consequences

Considering the different circumstances surrounding the respective media, it would be unfair to bind a game dramaturge to the exact artistic orientation of the theatre dramaturge. A game dramaturge is prone to work in an environment in which financial issues play a larger role than they do in the theatre, even when looking at the indie scene. She will also have less theory to fall back on than her colleague in the theatre, and work in a very different creative process in which different things will be expected of her. How the game dramaturge will differ from the theatre dramaturge, while at the same time staying productive as an active mirror, relay between theory and practice and as a creative contributor working from a dramaturgical perspective, is something we will discuss in the next chapter in the context of a concrete account for the game development process.

Ch. 4 The Dramaturge And The Game-Development Process.

4.1 The Game Development Process

Now that we have context for looking at dramaturgy in a non-media specific sense, and established some general perspectives for the different necessary demeanor for dramaturges according to the process they participate in, I now want to look at concrete possibilities for the integration of the dramaturge in the game development process.

For this effort, I will first look at the industry standard (larger) game development processes and discuss indie game development processes afterward. First of all it is easier to find literature about processes focusing on the industry. Also such processes tend to be more structured. Most things written about industry processes probably also apply to the indie game scene, only less structured in a black and white manner. Of course the flexibility of such indie processes requires its own specific demeanor from dramaturges (perhaps not entirely unfamiliar when compared to the theatre dramaturge), but those can better be discussed after we have a good grasp on the more sterile accounts of industry focused perspectives on game development

I will approach the possibilities for the integration of the dramaturge in the game development process from two different angles. First of all I will look at how the dramaturge might relate to the rest of the development team. What are the specific tasks of the other members of the team, and how and why should the dramaturge interact with them? Since I will argue the game designer to be the equivalent of the director in the game development process, she will be the most prominent and elaborated on team member. I will also discuss the level designers, quality assurance testers, dialogue writers, producer and marketing team in various degrees of elaboration.

After this team-focused discussion on the position of the dramaturge in the game development process, I will look at various stages of the process. I want to go beyond a general relation with the various other disciplines, towards discussing concrete possible ways for the dramaturge to assist in and by various tasks.

As said, after having approached the integration of the dramaturge in the process in such a systematic manner, I will look at specific things to pay mind to when working as a game dramaturge in a smaller development team. Also I will try to zoom out somewhat and try to distinguish between working on a per-project basis, or as an in house dramaturge in either of the processes.

4.2 The Team Structure

To understand the position of the different teams and how a game dramaturge might relate to them, it is important to get a good grip on the team structure. Fullerton et. al. Say the following about the team structure of a game-design process:

> To understand team structure, we must first examine the relationship between the publisher and the developer. As any game developer can tell you, this relationship is critical. It determines how everything else will be structured. The types of relationships vary. Sometimes the developer will do almost everything but sell and market the game. Other times, the publishers will pick up much of the development and internalize it, utilizing the developer only for specific tasks. […] Typically, the publisher gives the developer an advance against royalties, and the developer uses this money to pay the team members, cover overhead, and subcontract certain portions of the work. The developer's main task is to deliver the product, while the publisher's is to finance and distribute it. (Fullerton et al., 2004: 319)

For the scope of this essay, the delicate financial intricacies of this relation are not that important, but this general divide of interests and responsibilities is important to be aware of, because it contextualizes the position of each team member. First we will start on the developer's side, since this is also where the game designer is positioned.

4.3.1 Developer's Team

I would call the developer's team the more artistic of the two. This does not necessarily mean of course that they are naive or unaware about the economic side of game development, or that their colleagues on the publisher's side are not interested in the artistic aspects of game development. However it is only natural that different backgrounds and responsibilities bring along different perspectives, and it wouldn't be too farfetched to think of the developer's team as the artistic motor.

4.3.2 The Game Designer.

First and foremost a game dramaturge will need to establish a good working relationship with the (lead) game designer. The game designer is the prominent artistic force present in the project and

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like the director in a theatre production it is the person with the "artistic vision". Tracy Fullerton et. al. say the following about the role of the game designer in the game design process:

> The game designer envisions how a game will work during play. She creates the
> objectives, rules, and procedures, thinks up the dramatic premise and gives it life, and
> is responsible for planning everything necessary to create a compelling player
> experience. In the same way that an architect drafts a blueprint for a building or a
> screenwriter produces the script for a movie, the game designer plans the structural
> elements of a system that, when set in motion by the players, creates the interactive
> experience. (Ibid. : 2)

Of course, such a person in a process is prone to be a central figure in the development process. As such, one of the most important skills next to simply actually being creative to have for a game designer, is to be able to communicate her ideas well to the other members of the team and have a good working relationship with them. One tool at the game designer's disposal for clear communication is the game design document. The game design document contains detailed information on all major features of the game like artistic concept, visual style, control schemes, interfaces, genre, difficulty, target audience and so on. This document, once approved by the producer, will be used by all other team members as a point of reference during production phase, and will probably morph a couple of times before then. It would almost go without saying that the game dramaturge can obviously assist the designer in the creation of this document, akin tot the construction of the dramatic concept in classical theatre dramaturgy.

For a large part, the game designer - game dramaturge relation could seems to resemble the theatre director – theatre dramaturge relation. The dramaturge having a serving role, aiding and advising the central creative figure to enable her artistic view to prosper. The game dramaturge could also be involved in research, particularly research aimed at the analysis of aesthetic operations. Just like in the theatre, the room for open discussion between the game dramaturge and other members of the team depends on the particular process and participants at hand, and would perhaps best be off at the game designer's discretion.

One major difference seems to be the triangular relationship with the producer who we will discuss next. The bigger decisions are not just left at the discretion of the game designer but have to be approved by the producer. This also leads to the more general point that the game designer in the end doesn't hold the same executive position the theatre director sometimes does. This directly influences the relationship between the game designer and game dramaturge, as the game

dramaturge will need to be more open and transparent about her activities to the other teams lest she risks losing goodwill and cooperation, while at the same time remaining to be the game designer's creative partner.

4.3.3 The Producer

The producer is the project leader on the developer's team and the single point of communication with the publisher's team. The producer is also the main person on the developer's team to think about budgets and schedules etc. Fullerton et. al. say the following about the relationship between the game designer and producer:

> As a game designer, you must work hand-in hand with the producer. This means sitting down together at the start of any production and going over the design document in detail. It's your job to make certain that the producer crafts a realistic schedule and budget and the producer can't do this without a clear understanding of the game you plan to make. […] This means that to be a really efficient game designer, you need to understand the ins and outs of scheduling and budgeting almost as well as the producer. You don't have to create these documents, or be responsible for tracking them, but you should review them carefully and understand each line item. […] The producer and the game designer must work in concert; otherwise the production team will receive mixed messages. (Ibid.: 356)

Although budgets are not generally associated with dramaturgical activities, they can be a useful tool in the context of the game development process. By having a good grasp on budgeting, the game dramaturge can get some idea on which creative suggestions have the potential for getting a green light from the producer and which probably won't. Also one could effectively look for less costly alternatives for shot down ideas that might create a similar aesthetic effect.

Lastly, knowing how the producer thinks could help in advocating certain creative suggestions to her that would need her green light. A game dramaturge could assist the game designer in this effort, especially if she can back up the suggestion with research data. Examples of such research might be marketing research or playtest research, as we will see later on.

4.3.4 The Level Designers

Level designers are very close creative partners of the game designer. Whereas the game designer is responsible for the overall gameplay elements and rules, the level designers are responsible for the actual implementation and structuring of those rules and gameplay elements per level, using designer toolkits or level editors provided by the programming team.(Ibid. 333) There is no strict rule about where game design stops and level design begins, and Fullerton et. al. have the following to say about the relationship between game designers and level designers:

> Responsibilities of level designers include: Implementing level designs; coming up with level concepts; testing levels and working with designer to improve overall gameplay […] As a game designer, you'll want to develop a close working relationship with your level designers. […] Because levels are so critical, sometimes game designers can become somewhat controlling of how they are implemented. […] As with artists however, you can usually achieve better results by fostering creativity in your level designers rather than making them tow a strict line. If you've created an amazing system of gameplay, it will inspire your designers to come up with combinations and situations that you may not have even thought of in your initial pass at the game levels.(Ibid.: 334)

As the game designer's partner, a game dramaturge would first and foremost have to take this message to heart and make sure that she doesn't come across like an extra source of restriction for the level designers. That said; the level designerw will have regular meetings with the game designer during the development process. As the process progresses, such meetings might open up some room for the dramaturge as a creative contributor to make some suggestions in the form of constructive feedback. Although there will be less room for artistic changes the further the process has progressed, the dramaturge could still make use of that time to study certain level-specific aesthetic operations.

As a relay between theory and practice, the dramaturge could if so desired research architecture, geography and landscaping subjects and develop some quick and dirty presentations for the level designers and others who might be interested. She can also help set up and analyze test sessions with focus groups. And as an active mirror she can of course always give a fairly objective perspective on the current composition, when time doesn't allow for outside input through test sessions.

4.3.5 The Quality Assurance Engineers

The QA engineers are responisble for bug testing, which is different from playtesting . Their tests are barely about aesthetic reflection and instead focus on making sure that the game works properly and does not exhibit unexpected undesirable behaviour.(Ibid: 358-359) Taking care of feedback related issues from the QA engineers is not something in which the dramaturge can be of great importance, except for when the bug is not software related (e.g. a programming bug) but instead an undesirable circumstance as the result of game mechanics. The dramaturge as a creative contributor can help the game designer come up with a solution since she has studied both the aesthetic and (derivatively) the logical operations of the game.

Also, the feedback the QA engineers give can be good barometer for estimating room for creative suggestions later in the process. If a level comes through the QA's test with flying colours ahead of schedule, then this might be a good time for aesthetic nitpicking in order to improve the overall experience. If you're pushing a deadline and a number substantial amount of bugs are mentioned in the QA feedback, then avoiding putting more stress on the process and keeping your aesthetic suggestions to yourself might be the most constructive thing to do. Even if one takes it as a potential loss for the specific project, she could always make it a moot point for academic reflection in her own time.

4.3.6 The Dialogue Writers

Dialogue writers are not present in every game. Their mere presence suggests a game with a narrative component. When this narrative component has branching story lines or any other type of interactive narrative, the story becomes part of the gameplay experience. This is because the interaction with the story will start to foreshadow gameplay. Accepting missions, challenging characters, buying items; all of these actions can be, and often are done through dialogue and have direct consequences for the game situation following it.

When two sign systems start to interact with each other, they can sometimes bring up unexpected results concerning the aesthetic experience they create. Because of her

relative distance from the project and her analytical skills, the game dramaturge might be in a good position to keep an eye on how gameplay and story interact with each other. As a writer, one can get really into the characters or the dramatic situation and maybe lose sight of what a conversation might signify from a gameplay point of view, which is a point of view the player will most likely have. If the working relationship permits it, a dramaturge could be a steady asset to the writing team throughout the project.

4.4.1 The Publisher's Team

Of course everyone wants the game to be a success. The publisher is about translating that ambition to cold hard sales numbers. The publisher deals with distributors, retailers, marketing channels and so forth. (Ibid.: 362-365) Generally speaking, the game designer doesn't deal too much with the publisher's team, and at first glance there would seem to be even less potential for the game dramaturge to have a fruitful relationship with the publisher.

However, since the publisher is invested in making the game a financial success, they also invest a lot in learning about their target audiences. Market research efforts are already well integrated in the game product development process, and the knowledge inherently generated by such efforts would be at a dramaturge's disposal if she wishes to make use of it.

4.4.2 The Marketing Department

It is the marketing team's goal to have a good pulse on a game's target audience and the game consumer at large. According to Fullerton et. al.:

> The marketing team can be an asset to the open-minded game designer. This is because they are the strongest link to the demands and desires of buyers. It's their job to know the market, and if you can interpret the data they have creatively, you can address the trends and features that people are interested in without sacrificing your core gameplay. (Ibid.: 363)

I sincerely agree with the assertion that there is a difference between knowing what an audience wants, and doing what they say. And while this is nevertheless a tricky artistic minefield for the

game designer, a game dramaturge wouldn't even be directly concerned with the actual creative choice making process in the first place. For a game dramaturge, the knowledge to be gained from market research would not be about trends or features, but about gaining insight on general characteristics of the target audience.

Insights in how the target audience thinks can provide some relative objective guidelines in constructing preferred readings. One would of course be well-advised to incorporate a certain degree of reservation in the consideration as to what extent such constructions can account for the collection of individual perspectives of a large and pluriform audience, as per how this has been discussed earlier in chapter two. This would however not preclude using such data for making informed estimations for the practical purpose of creative choice making in stead of claims of universal truth.

4.5.1 The Dramaturge And The Stages Of The Process.

For as of yet we have looked at all the possible ways in which a dramaturge could be of assistance in a game development project. Just like in the theatre though, the process is made up of several stages that each are characterized by their own specific activities and needs. Not during every stage will a dramaturge be able to assist in the same manner and we will now look at what a dramaturge could actually do in specific stages of the process.

4.5.2 The Stages

Fullerton et. al. divide the stage of a game development process in several stages, four of which will be most important for the efforts of this thesis:

- 	The concept phase

- 	The pre-production phase

- 	The production phase

- 	The QA phase

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(Ibid.: 376)

4.5.3 The Concept Phase

There are two sides to the concept phase. On the one hand there is of course the crystallization of the idea. What genre will the game be? How will it be produced? How will it look and how will it need to feel? In this stage the development team might already make a software prototype, but perhaps instead of that, a paper and pen prototype and/or mood boards and the like. Some initial playtesting will probably take place and there will be a lot of brainstorming.(bid.:376-378)

On the other hand the concept phase is also about getting a publisher enthusiastic about the idea, to the point that she is willing to invest in it. This means that next to the artistic idea, the developer will need to make a project plan including a budget and schedules, which contain timetables, team constellations, software requirements, hardware requirements etc.(Ibid.: 376-378)

A game dramaturge can be of assistance in both of these efforts. As an active mirror, she can reflect on both the artistic concept in creation and the creative process accompanying it and as a creative contributor she can have artistic input in its creation. As a relay between theory and practice she can set up ideas for playtesting and start to cautiously work on gaining insights in the aesthetic operations of the projected gameplay.

The game dramaturge can also start to look at market research already this early in the process. On the one hand in order to help the team pitch the idea to the publisher in terms of marketability, but this is not the only reason. Market research also involves looking at other type of games in the same genre and the target audience they addresses. One could consider it akin to play history analysis and the cultural analysis of the venue for a theatre performance. Again, knowing what your audience thinks is not doing what they say, and gaining insights into an audience's state of mind can also help in confronting them artistically. Essentially, knowing your target audience means doing a more precise job as an active mirror.

The concept stage is a stage where a lot is still possible. As an active mirror and creative contributor, the game dramaturge could be helpful in this stage, just like in the theatre where in the classical dramaturge – director relationship she assists in the construction of the artistic concept. On the other hand there isn't much actual content yet to actively reflect on, aside from a very early prototype and maybe some initial concept art. The actual active mirroring of content will have to wait for later.

4.5.4 The Pre-Production Phase.

The pre-production phase is about refining the concept, finalizing the design document, fleshing out the specifics of the project plan and making a presentable prototype or playable level as a proof of concept including differentiating features and risky technology. At this point the publisher has committed to funding a small pre-production team for any period between about one and five months and clear conditions for milestones and approvals have been set. (Ibid.: 378)

At the end of the pre-production phase the publisher will decide to either kill the project or fully finance it. She will evaluate the proof of concept, the feasibility of the required technology, the design document and the project plan. In short, the publisher will decide if this particular project is worth the risk or not. (Ibid.: 378)

At this point the dramaturge should have a good grasp on the game's market segment and she can integrate this knowledge in conducting outside playtest sessions. Playtesting with outsiders is already common practice in the games industry, but a dramaturge might have a very productive combination of general academic skills and an eye for aesthetic operations to go beyond mere qualitative evaluations of the product in development towards learning more about how the target audience actually perceives the game.

As a dramaturge, as a relay between theory and practice, she could thus lead the construction of playtest evaluation by academic methodology, but also can use the knowledge gained from that effort to make informed predictions later in the process, or at the very least to adapt her insights on the expectation patterns of the target audience in order to improve her efforts as an active mirror later on in the process.

This level or prototype will be all about pleasing the publisher though, so the guidelines for the overall experience will not only be a demonstration of technological considerations, but also aimed at the publisher's expectations about the audience. These might not always fall in line entirely with the developer's expectations about the audience, and it is important to distinct between the two. The developer looks at the target audience as an audience, while the publisher looks at them as a customer. The final game has to appeal to the target audience, the final prototype will have to appeal to the publisher. A game dramaturge might serve the rest of the team best by also considering the publisher's point of view.

4.5.5 Production Phase

During the production phase the working room for the game dramaturge might be rather limited. It is the phase in which a full-fledged development team will work towards the creation of the game's alpha version, which means that everything is put into place and functions as it should, after which the game only needs to be polished. The production phase generally lasts anywhere between nine and fifteen months and all programmers, artists, designers etc. have their own clear schedule and milestones. (Ibid: 354-356)

During this stage of development there will probably be no more major changes possible in the gameplay as such. At most there will be some balancing issues, or maybe (at most) the addition of or deletion of individual game-items (weapons or perks for example) but the general mechanics will remain in place.(Ibid: 354-356) The levels still all have to be built though, so this is the time for the dramaturge to assist the game designer in her interactions with the level designers

The fleshing out of the level layouts takes place at the beginning of each level's construction, and it is during these meeting between the game and level designer(s) that the dramaturge might want to weigh in from the audiences point of view if necessary.

4.5.6 QA / Polishing Phase

The QA and polishing phase is about making sure that everything present works properly instead of actually creating new content. This phase is not to be underestimated:

> It is in this last stage that the developer has a chance to truly see their game for what it is and to make sure it offers the best possible experience for the player. The difference between a game rushed off to market and one which has had the luxury of a good polishing can be enormous. It's the subtle tuning of gameplay and tweaks to timing and controls that can create an unforgettable player experience, and this is the level of quality that makes blockbuster games.(Ibid.: 356)

This is a very stressful period with the games launch nearing and getting feedback from the QA team. Not all tweaks will make the cut and the developer has to get her priorities straight.

Although it would be logical to think that the game dramaturge should take a further step back, this could actually be a time for the game dramaturge to push through small changes to enhance the game, if she has done her homework. The game dramaturge could have her own report on tweaks that would enhance the game from an aesthetics point of view. Of course these should not be presented on top of the QA feedback, but they could be taken along with tweaks already made because of QA. When a spell check is made in a specific dialogue, a certain word that carries a lot of meaning might be altered as well if necessary. If the number of enemies in a certain level is increased due to balancing issues (the level might be too easy), then it is also not too difficult make one of those enemies appear from that one unexpected corner that would add an element of surprise to the experience. If an animation has to be repaired since it doesn't seem to be loaded at every single playthrough, it might not be too difficult to make it start two seconds earlier.

In order not to frustrate the process, the game dramaturge probably would want to consider the order of importance suggested by the QA team and take note of the delicacy of the stressful situation. This is another suggestion that seems to keep popping up, but it is even more important during the QA/polishing phase then anywhere else since it generally is the most explosive phase of production. This phase is where the dramaturge might notice the difference between having invested in goodwill during the earlier stages or not.

4.6 The Industry

The different teams and stages defined in the preceding paragraphs have looked at game dramaturgy as it possibly could exist in the games industry and we will talk about the specifics of the indie scene in the next paragraph. There are however still a couple of things left to say about the subject in the context of industry game development that didn't really fit in one of the earlier paragraphs.

First of all, industry developers hardly ever work on one game at a time. At different stages of development, different teams vary in size because of a difference in need of specific disciplines. From a resource management point of view, it would be very foolish to send your concept artists home on a paid vacation, or let go of great talent, while in the QA phase of your current game. Most development studios are already working on the next title while finishing the last, and the really big studios even have multiple producers and several core teams overlapping in development processes so they can shift around periphery employees from one project to the next.(Ibid.: 365)

This beckons the question on the position of the game dramaturge. Is a dramaturge simply dedicated to one single project? Should one dramaturge work on several projects at once? And what does it say about the game dramaturge's several disciplines? Is one game dramaturge appointed to analysing aesthetic operations, giving active feedback on a wide variety of issues and setting up playtest procedures, or are there several game dramaturges each focussing on one task? Or should there be several game dramaturges circulating between these tasks? Perhaps it would be wise to consider game dramaturges with different backgrounds, ranging from text specialists to former scenographers.

Another point I want to address is the prudence I advocated for the game dramaturge's behaviour. It may seem like I overreact and I agree that a dramaturge can't do her work at all if she has to walk on eggshells. The truth is though, that dramaturges only recently have become widely accepted in the theatre, and the notion of the personification of intellectualism seems off putting to many artists in general, and people involved in games specifically. To add to this, the industry is a fast lane commercial type of business, and this reflects the individuals working in it. The industry probably attracts a certain type of person, and it most definitely puts off others. The industry might not be the best part of the game development spectrum for experimenting with the artistic process, and while having discussed it first for reasons of clarity, it is now a good time to look at a probably somewhat less hostile environment.

4.7 Independent Game Development

Independent game studios are generally a lot smaller than their big brothers in the industry. Also their games tend to be more innovative.(Ibid.: 437) This has its own consequences for the functioning of the game dramaturge.

Since the teams and the budgets are a lot smaller, there is more room for flexibility in the process. At the same time, there is (most likely) less specific expertise in the development team (as a direct result of the number of team members) and the game dramaturge should adapt her focus and feedback accordingly. It is not constructive to comment on things that can only be remedied by overcoming technical and or temporal barriers, and the game dramaturge should be aware of what these are. However, the process is less hierarchical and bureaucratic and if a change causes a ripple effect through every discipline in the process, this can be more easily discussed in the smaller, more

flexible indie development team then when dealing with the rigid structure and pre-defined milestone commitments of the industry environment.

Generally though, the technical restrictions during development will be integrated into the concept and it's design document and project plan. You're not going to make state of the art AI for first person shooter bots when making a puzzle game. And this brings us to the second point of attention, which is about the sort of projects one generally works on in the independent game development segment. The indie scene tends to be thought of as more creative, innovative (aside from technological innovation) and minimalistic than the industry segment and that thought seems to coincide with the type of games they bring forth. Games like these generally tend to be less cinematic with epic narratives, and instead seem to be more "artsy" (for lack of a better word) and abstract. In other words there are probably less details to worry about so the game dramaturge would want to hit the ground running during the concept phase.

The more flexible process and straight forward game design are contextualised by a generally more informal team atmosphere. This could work to the advantage of the game dramaturge in terms of creating goodwill and directly validating her presence in the process to her team mates. Also, if the independent team won't look for a publisher in the end, but decides to sell their game directly on marketplaces like the ones for the Iphone and the XBOX indie channel for example, the game dramaturge could engage in "desk-dramaturgy-eque" activities like managing the website and publishing news about the process and the concept. In that manner, she could also get in contact with game journalists in order to get the game some exposure. If the aim is to attract a publisher, this is of course more a job for the publisher's marketing team, just like in the industry.

4.8.1 Conclusion

So what can be said about how the game development process could facilitate the dramaturge to engage in dramaturgical activities in the context of a performance structure and experience relationship:

4.8.2 As A Relay Between Theory And Practice:

-she can interpret market research to construct preliminary guidelines for a data based audience perspective.

-she can do pre-research on historical, philosophical, art or other data related to the concept and present this research to interested parties.

-she can help set up playtest sessions in order to incorporate the evaluation of audience experience in the context of aesthetics.

-she can help the game designer convince the producer of the value of certain ideas by backing them up with market research and/or playtest data.

As a relay between theory and practice the dramaturge should pay mind to the rigid schedule of the game design process. Reading takes time. Theorizing takes time. Making presentations takes time. These efforts should be synchronized with the rest of the development process. Also, when doing research, a certain degree of quick and dirty-ness over academic purity and methodological correctness might make her efforts more flexible, and thus more able to cater to the needs at hand in the process.

4.8.3 As An Active Mirror:

-she can give constructive feedback to various people throughout the creative process from both her own subject positioned perspective, as well as constructed audience perspectives.

-she can give feedback tot the game designer during the construction of the design document.

-she can, during the creation fop the project plan, research the publisher's subject position and help the development team in framing creative ideas in a desired direction from that perspective.

As an active mirror in the game design process, a game dramaturge should be flexible and transparent about several subject positions she can advocate. On the one hand there is the use of market research that can be used for a preliminary audience perspective. Then there is playtest analysis for a more detailed audience perspective. Sometimes there is no time for either of those and

the game dramaturge will have to work solely from her personal subject position. And when making the project plan, she can present an indication of the publisher's point of view on the developments by having researched it's profile. A game dramaturge should be aware of these different roles and be transparent about them to the other team-members, so they also can make an informed personal estimation as to what value to accredit to the feedback.

4.8.4 As A Creative Contributor:

-she can make creative suggestion throughout the project from her specific position of having gotten a solid theoretical grasp of the concept aesthetic operations.

-she can help finding alternatives for ideas that are shot down by the producer that create similar experiential effects from a theoretical perspective on the aesthetic operations of the concept.

As a creative contributor the dramaturge should carefully consider the state and flow of the creative process. She is still the "other" in the process and dependent upon her individual relationship with other team-members, her involvement in the specific subject at hand, the team-dynamics, the pressures of deadlines, etc. her contributions could be experienced as either helpful or frustrating and a lot of shades in between.

CH. 5. Conclusion

5.1 The Thesis

There is no denying that the idea of a game dramaturge I have constructed in this essay differs significantly from the dramaturge as she currently exists in the theatre. It is even fair to question if she can still rightfully be called a dramatruge at all. My response would probably be along the lines that I am not one for semantics in the first place, and that if the name would need to be adapted to describe involvement in the game design process that's fine with me.

Constructing a perspective on intermediation between theory on games and everyday design practice has also been my effort. I have chosen to work with the concept of dramaturgy, actually because of the fact that it refers to both the text's structure and experience relation, and the activities of the person acting as an influence of theoretical contemplation in the creative process.

So what are the actual differences between the theatre dramaturge and the picture of the game dramaturge I have painted in this essay? I am not going to list the obvious differences like game dramaturges probably generally having to be gamers in stead of theatre frequenters, or the specific differences handled in the context of other chapters like game dramaturges having to be more flexible in the theory they base themselves on because of the lack of a not nearly complete ludological corpus. I think however that one example of a more general difference is that as opposed to the theatre dramaturge, the game dramaturge must be more invested in the economical side of the production process. The fact that dramaturges are a rarity in big commercial theatre productions is quite telling (without making any judgment). I'm not saying that dramaturges are supposedly not interested in a more commercial oriented process, or that the production process of the big commercial shows feel no need at all for an intellectual other, but apparently the two have not found enough mutual understanding for a productive cooperation in the past couple of decades.

While I could make a long argument of why the game dramaturge is best off not ignoring the industry because of a mutual beneficence in the sense of interesting developments taking place in the industry that are not (or barely) present in the indie scene (think of AI development for example), I believe there is a much more fundamental issue at stake here. It is not merely that the game dramaturge should be more commercially oriented to cater to the needs of the industry as opposed to the indie scene. What I think is that games tend to make less of a distinction between Art and Entertainment than the theatre does. The vast majority of the indie games are just as interested in entertaining the player as is the case in the industry. Commercialism has traditionally been seen as a symptom of lowbrow culture, and the dramaturge has been seen as sort of a dilettante. This

might be a part of the reason for the gap between the dramaturge and the commercial theatre. In the games industry, there is no highbrow culture identity of any real significance, and the game dramaturge should adapt her perspective accordingly.

In game dramaturgy as I have described it in this essay, the lines between desk dramaturgy and floor dramaturgy seem to blur somewhat. Audience analysis and thinking about the publisher's perspective go hand in hand with the creative choice making. Again, a game dramaturge might want to work in the indie scene and totally ignore publishers and audience analysis but this would most likely be the exception instead of the status quo when looking at the opportunities offered by the game development landscape in it's entirety.

5.2 Reflection

As a reader, you may have noticed me having trouble with finding the right tone in this essay. On the one hand, as I am very aware of myself, some of my assertions and suggestions sound as if I myself am a game dramaturgy veteran, hardened and wise by years of both industry and indie scene based practice. This is of course not true not only because my practice based experience in either of these fields is very minimal, but all the more by the assumptions preceding this thesis, namely a lack of constructive symbioses between game design theory and practice, for which I argue dramaturgy as a paradigm countering that problem in the first place.

On the other hand, at times I seem to be using words like "might", "could" "perhaps" and "potential" a lot. At those times what I say may seem somewhat overly careful. I have tried to rewrite some phrases many times to get rid of either tonal excess, but the truth is that they reflect the subject matter. There is no game dramaturge yet and all of my conclusions are based more on inference than observation. All I say should be considered in that context and therefore, I think it is only natural that my tone be somewhat reserved at some times. On the other hand this is an argumentative thesis. Considering the resistance the dramaturge has had in the theatre, a medium currently in a much more experimental mode than games, I can't help but wanting to get in my own punches about how to go about the integration of the dramaturge in the process, even if it comes across somewhat naïve from somebody in my position that actually lacks a lot of real life experience with the subject matter.

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5.3 Personal View on Dramaturgy

So how has this whole effort affected my own look on dramaturgy. Well first of all, I have become a bit more cynical. What started in my own head as an idealistic effort of changing the game development process (over time) with the integration of an intellectual other has become a strong awareness of the political implications of changing an existing system, and the need of compromise for the goal of consensus. I'd like to clarify that I have no problem at all with incorporating market research and economical motives. I am not an artistic purist, rather a creative pragmatist. But I might have been somewhat naive beforehand about the room for the processing of theory. Trying to make dramaturgy compatible with the game design process as a thought experiment as I have done in chapter four, has made me realize that there is probably very little time for such efforts in a creative process, and that in reality, game dramaturges would spend considerably more time analyzing statistical data than researching theory on media aesthetics. How much the dramaturge can intellectualize the game development process would remain to be seen.

For me personal, this whole course has made me realize that I am not a dramaturge pur sang. I might be a creative person with an affinity for theory and focus on compositional elements, but that does not a dramaturge make does it? I am way too opinionated to be an active mirror and not selfless enough to be dedicated to someone else's artistic vision for any meaningful period of time. There might be room within a team of designers for someone to take up the responsibility for artistic research though, which is something that I would be aiming for in the years to come. In my own time, I could then further work out some thoughts on issues I've come across in that position.

As we have seen, the industry and indie scene processes differ significantly from one and other. While I couldn't say with a sufficient degree of certainty that the game dramaturge would stand a better chance in one of the over the other, I lean towards the indie scene. Also I would consider different strategies for either. In the industry, it is important to be aware of the hierarchy and the ability to constantly prove ones value in the process. In an experimental indie team, the game dramaturge might be left with more room to develop her position once she is accepted by the majority of the team. Also, as the industry attracts a certain type of people, this also goes for the indie scene. And the people drawn to to indie game development might generally be a bit more open to experimentation.

5.4 Future Research

One thing that needs attention in the time to come is field research. People will actively need to seek to intellectualize a creative process in game development in their own ways and log their experiences. People need to seek out people who both make games and theorize about them, and ask them about how in their own experiences the one influences the other. Both of these things would help a lot. All perspectives on theatre dramaturgy base themselves on a large collection of individual and local experiences. A solid perspective on game dramaturgy can't be based on a single experience or a single literary research effort, but such individual efforts can in the long run help contribute to a larger perspective. I like to think of this thesis as one of those building blocks, not the actual house by far.

Then there is one essay I would like to mention for further reading on the subject matter. It's Javier Sansho's Master Thesis "*Exploring Computer Game Dramaturgy*: *An exploration into the relationship between the theory of game studies and the practice of game design and development*."(Sancho, 2010), which is a great investigation of the potential for practical application of game studies knowledge that also focuses on the dramaturge as a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and a much more objective effort than my own. It's a great read, and as I write this you can still find it online, so I suggest you go read it right now. Go! What are you still doing here?

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