

DAY 1: COLLECTING & SUPPLYING

Overview

Today is for gathering materials. The first hour of this day is a slog of tiny, fast exercises. Think of it like building a pantry or supply chest. We'll make lots of lists, do memory-recall exercises and timed writings, activating our language brains, plundering our imaginations and gleaning a little from the environment we're in too. We'll then improvise some writing. The culmination of Day 1 is a set of writing prompts we make for ourselves out of constellations derived from these lists. Then from all this matter, we'll grow people, voices, and scenes on Day 2.

Note on Tempo

In the list exercises, try to work at speed, taking whatever comes to mind. These are oriented toward the vast holding of ideas that are in reserve at any given moment. Let it spill.

In the timed writing exercises, try to write at a more relaxed, thoughtful tempo, but don't let yourself stop writing. Some timed writings will ask questions you won't know the answer to yet since you're starting from scratch. Just go to the edge of the unlit space and call the question into the vagueness. If you don't get an answer back, it's probably because you're just judging yourself too harshly. Remember everything can be jettisoned, so just get stuff onto the page now.

Hour 0–1.5

The warmup is about speed. Don't overthink it. Accept the wrong answers that come to your mind-hand. It's a warmup but also a chance to trawl your language and image brain. It's punctuated with occasional reflective timed writings that then feed back into the language and image roll.

Warmup: Word Brain

(approx. 15 mins; use a timer)

1 min: Write a list of all the verbs enacted by the space you're in. These might be actions people are doing if people are in the space with you, but try to think about what the walls, the floor, and the air are doing too.

1 min: Write a list of words beginning with the letter B.

1 min: Write a list of names you could give an elderly pig.

1 min: Write a list of words pertaining to any process of repair.

1 min: Write a list of words from the specialized vocabulary of a particular trade, hobby, game, or area of technical knowledge—go with the first one that comes to mind.

5-minute timed writing: Articulate what you've learned or come to think about humans lately. Scale is up to you—humanity in general, subsets, types, or a particular human (maybe even yourself). Don't use this time to judge; this is not necessarily a moral question. Just try to articulate something about mechanism or habit.

1 min: Write a list of verbs that counteract, jam, or dissolve the behavior you wrote about in the last prompt.

2 mins: Vacancy.* Pens down. Attend to the room you're in. Stretch or drink water.

*(*On vacancy: I borrow this word from Erik Ehn, who prescribes a period of vacancy in the middle of a writing day when he leads silent writing retreats. Likewise, K.J. Holmes told me once that she always places a period of rest in the middle of (dance) class.)*

Generators: Event/Site

(approx. 15 mins)

The first four lists ask for types—generics; only the fifth list is specific

Lists: Place/type

(approx. 10 minutes)

List 10 types of places in the natural world (that is, names humans give to particular natural phenomena)

List 10 types of space constructed by animals

List 10 types of spaces architects will have to problem-solve in the future

List 5 spaces of vastly different scales from each other

List your 4 favorite places in the world (as it stands today)

Generator: Site/Figure/Process

This generative exercise is good for thinking about landscape or setting as a container for both ephemeral activity and deep-time processes. It's also a nice body meditation to bring your attention

to your day. Read through the script of the exercise and then complete. Do actually close your eyes and try to conjure each element from your visual-proprioceptive mind.

Close your eyes and scan your body's skeletal structure—as if you had a roving camera gliding through the interior of your body. With your mind's eye, give attention to the curving surfaces and structures you encounter. Find a spot in your body to zero in on, say, perhaps the arch of your foot and the angle at which it meets the ground or a shoe, or the upward swoop of the lower jawbone.

Look at the shape in your mind's eye as a line drawing—just an abstract curving line in space.

Now think of a place in the natural landscape, a place not built by humans, that shares some feature of that shape. Open your eyes and write down the name of that place. Then close your eyes again.

Someone appears in that space. Who appears if you think of that space as a location in an allegory?

Open your eyes and record the figure, then close your eyes again. Who appears in that space if you think of it as a location in a true crime TV show? Open your eyes and record the figure, then close your eyes again. Who appears in that space if you think of it as a location in an illustrated alphabet book? As a Book of Hours? Open your eyes and record the figure, then close your eyes again.

Something happened here a long time ago, or will happen over time, far into the future. Some process that takes years to complete, not moments. What happened or will happen? Open your eyes and record the process, then close your eyes.

Now consider a different kind of process, either one that unfolds over a different timescale, or a process influenced by different agents of change. What else has happened here or will happen over a long duration? Open your eyes and record that second process.

Repeat this loop three or four more times. Alternate your location between human-built and naturally occurring spaces. Each time you repeat, change the story type for each location three times. Here are possible story types to apply—you can add your own to the list:

- a segment on a morning tv show
- a true crime documentary
- a survival narrative
- an anecdotal natural history
- a fairy tale
- a gothic tale of the supernatural
- a teenage romance
- a piece of longform journalism

2-3 mins: Vacancy

Generator: People

(approx. 10 mins)

Timed writing: Think about the voices you will bring together in your play as a kind of cast. Write for 7 minutes about the group of voices you might assemble in this emerging thing. Write about the feeling of listening to them. Write about the way they speak. Think about tone, electricity, intimacy, intensity. Think about roots, sources, funds of knowledge they might draw on. Think about what variables are open for you as you create the parameters of your cast. What other variables might you open?

List: Write down the full names of 3–5 people, real or fictional. Let them have excellent names. Write even more names if this appeals to you.

Generator: Images

(approx. 10 mins)

An image (as considered here) is something simultaneously distilled and resonant—a picture with enormous potential energy. It could be a figure of the imagination or an actual visible thing. There's crossover between image and object, and between image and activity in place. We'll look for both.

Activity in place

List ten images that use this basic template: An X in Y doing Z. Examples: a scientist on a boat scooping up whale poop with a net (heard that on a real radio story). A turtle in a vegetable garden laying eggs. A biker on a bridge dodging stopped cars. These can be things you've seen or heard about, or scenarios you conjure in your imagination.

Resonant objects

List five or six objects you've encountered in the last 24 hours, and for each, note something about its energy, appeal, or affect. Then list three objects you've thought about and maybe read about but never seen in person, and for each, note something about its energy, appeal, or affect. The scale is open: an object might be tiny—a thimble—or enormous—a subterranean fungal network.

Break—Change Your Place In The Room

Seriously, take a break and then go sit somewhere new to refresh your thinking and energize your body.

Generator: Memory Recall

I use this Lynda Barry exercise all the time to trawl for forgotten details from my own experience. See her awesome books *What It Is* or *Syllabus* for variations on this exercise and more.

Randomly pick an item from this list:

mop
other people's mothers
baby
cow
moon
glove
log
night
coat
hill
west
candy

Then write a list of the first ten scenes involving that word that spring up from your own memory. Your list can be shorthand—record just enough detail so you know what you're talking about.

Choose one that surprised you—that bubbled up out of a moment you don't think much about, perhaps.

Then on a blank piece of paper, draw a big X, corner to corner, across the entire page so it's quartered into triangles.

X-page notes: Put yourself in the scene in your mind's eye. Then use the X page to scatter recall notes that roughly organize the scene in space in a sensory way. Imagine your position is the center of the X. Write what's in front of you, to the sides of you, behind you. Don't write in sentences or paragraphs, just doodle remembered details all over the page. If you're not using a handwritten page, use "in front of me" etc. as headers. Turn yourself around inside the remembered scene; for six minutes, record whatever comes to mind in a disorganized way on the page.

Timed writing: Now spend 7 minutes writing what happened in the scene. Begin with the words "I am" and write the scene in the present tense.

Take a break.

Hour 1.5–3

Trawl

Look back over everything you recorded wrote down so far. With a different color pen than you've been using (or using the highlighter if you're working on screen), circle anything that appeals to your imagination. Circle whatever has resonant stuffness to you. The circles in the second color create a subset that your eye can easily find by just glancing over your notebook.

Trawling is useful in an instrumental sense—this list will plundered for parts. But this exercise is also a tool for noticing where your interest lies, an early signal from the percolation of new curiosities. Use this to tell you something about what the you of today is energized by. If you want to, you might even look over your trawl, and write yourself a note about what interests are strongest for you this morning, what this map of mind tells you about the you of today.

Timed Writing

(20 mins)

Someone tells a story about someone else. Who are they talking to? Let their audience feel physically present in the telling even if mostly silent.

—Incorporate an interruption from outside the story/storyteller.

—Find a moment or two to shift perspective. Ruminant on some tiny detail in the storyteller's present tense. Zoom out to the storyteller's sense of what's actually true about the world.

—Incorporate at least six things you circled from the day's lists.

Set a timer and write for a full 20 minutes. Don't rush, but don't allow yourself to stop either.

Wrap Up

Trawl (2)

Look back over what you've just written, and circle appealing details or passages from the story told about someone else. Then re-read all your circled items from the day—your trawl.

Sets

From those items in your trawl, on a fresh page, create sets of 3 or 4 items. The items in a set don't need to have an obvious relationship to each other. Put them into a set together because something about their proximity stirs your interest or curiosity. Create at least three sets.

Prompts

Write three prompts for yourself that are derived from three sets. You'll use these as a starting point tomorrow. These can take the form of scene prompts that could incorporate multiple voices, or storytelling prompts like the timed writing we just did. Don't be afraid to be literal. What is a prompt? Well, for example, if your set of four items is pine barrens + terrible cloud + Alice Elizabeth Biggs + tendency to be defensive, your prompt could be: a scene in the pine barrens under a storm from a terrible cloud, in which Alice Elizabeth Biggs gets defensive about everything her friend Piney says about being barren. Or: Alice Elizabeth Biggs listens to a public service announcement about the defensive value of pine barrens for uncontrolled wildfire while a terrible cloud of ash moves toward her home. Or: write the story of Alice Elizabeth Biggs' dream about the pine barrens and the terrible cloud and let her be pre-emptively defensive about all the imagery in it that seems overly sexual toward the wrong people. I'm just making stuff up, stringing some things together. That's the point.

Share

Share with your pods: a selected list of 10–15 things you circled. Think of it like showing someone the pebbles you brought home from the beach.

Respond

What mood does this constellation of things evoke for you? What is surprising to you in combination here? What associations does this list or any particular thing on it prompt?

If you're responding to yourself, give yourself a break before you write your response. Maybe look at the list right before you go to bed, or first thing tomorrow morning. Approach it generously, as if it was presented to you by someone else.

DAY 2: HEARING VOICES, FOLLOWING VOICES

Today's session brings an array of voices and speakers into focus. The goal is to let the voices come forward without rushing the story forward too. Resist the impulse to rationalize, organize, and make sense. We won't be speedy and random as we were on Day 1, but we should still be guided by openness and receptivity.

Today we use a single tool—an exercise I call Image Fringe. We use it repeatedly, in alternation with writing periods. When you read through it the first time its many steps may seem cumbersome, but as you repeatedly cycle through it, the steps should streamline. Day 1 involved many short, fast, timed structures to maximize the amount of stuff we could get onto a page. Today we'll let go of that speed and drop into a steadier gear. I recommend setting a timer for each of the writing sessions—it's a useful way to dismiss the voice that rationalizes stopping before you're done. The exact durations are up to you.

Procedure

First Writing

(15-25 minutes)

At the end of Day 1, you created three prompts for yourself from three sets of culled images. Choose the most appealing prompt (appealing because you have a feeling for it or appealing because you don't understand it so it's strange and inviting) from your list, and write the scene (or monologue, etc.). This is an improvisation. Don't delete, revise, or start over. Pay particular attention to the sonority of the voices you're bringing forward. Try to let them occupy your ear. Let the sound lead the sense. Let them say whatever they want. Indulge.

Image Fringe Exercise

When you are done, choose one of the voices from what you just wrote, and do the Image Fringe exercise for them. (The exercise is detailed in full after these instructions.)

New Prompt & Write

Using the speaker you just did the Image Fringe exercise for, choose a new prompt from your set, or write yourself a new prompt that carries forward some elements of the last writing session. Modify so you can weave that speaker into the prompt, if needed. If you are writing a new prompt, glance back through your pages from yesterday, looking only at the items you circled. See if anything wants

to be incorporated or adapted. Then follow your prompt without questioning it. Pay attention this time to the sound of the different voices responding to each other. Even if you're writing for a single voice, think about the way they respond to their own thoughts or the voices in their head which they attune with or oppose.

Choose a new character from the scene you've written and do the Image Fringe exercise for them.

Repeat the cycle at least 3 times, maybe more. Embrace the idea that the work of bringing each successive voice into focus makes room for a new, different voice to articulate itself. You're building an array of voices on an expanding stage. Let it have range.

Image Fringe

(full exercise)

This exercise proceeds via radiation, linking ideas to concrete images to temperament and trait. It is especially useful for drawing a minor or unconsidered character into greater vividness and potential for relation.

Set a timer and spend two complete minutes visualizing your character in actionless, silent, but living presence, perhaps in the scene in which they first appeared to you.

Interview

Set a blank piece of paper next to you. Choose a question from the list of interview questions below, then close your eyes and, in your mind's ear, ask that question of your character. Let the character answer the question. Listen to their voice. Take your time. Then record key words or phrase of that character's response. Don't write down everything—just catch scraps. Write those scrap words anywhere on the paper; let it be scattered; resist organization. Move on to a new question and repeat. Use as many questions from the list as you'd like.

Whom do you address yourself to; who is the audience for your being and your actions?

How do you show yourself to your audience?

How does your idea of audience trip you up or derail you?

Visualize the embodiment of its criticism. Describe.

Visualize the embodiment of its adoration. Describe.

What do you want to learn?

What fears are always braided into what you think about?

What darkness are you capable of?

What lightness are you capable of?

What guides you in crisis?

What is a mood you recall from your childhood?

What kinds of things did you love to do as a child?

Who do you love?

Who do you deplore?

What do you love?

What do you deplore?

What is a world that's lost to you?

What is a world you want to find?

Radiation (the fringe)

After you have filled a page with a scatter of these keywords and phrases, take a different colored pen and circle a small set of words or phrases that interest you. Radiating out from each circled word or phrase, in an idea-bubble kind of mode, record specific actions or verbs that relate to that idea. Then choosing an action, radiate out further to specific objects or images that relate to that action. You don't need to force these objects or images to be within the world of your play. You don't need to worry about the whole chain relating to each other. The action relates to the phrase. The object relates to the action. The idea is to arrive at a concrete image that bears a trace source relationship to the honest reflections of a character. The linkage may never be visible to another reader, but it will lend your images force.

key words—>actions/verbs—>images/objects

After you've created several of these radials, choose a constellation of four images or objects from your whole sheet:

Assign each to image one of these functions:

- a keyword for the character's way of identifying/understanding/locating themselves
- a preoccupation or rooted way of thinking that influences their way of seeing

- a clue to one of their reflexes of reaction/response to a certain kind of situation
- a keyword for a vocabulary they possess, an expertise, deep knowledge, or affection

Write a short stream-of-consciousness passage to get to know this character. Play with using the constellation of assigned images/objects as both fodder and limitation. I enjoy this exercise as a way to generate character attributes. For example, I did this exercise with a minor character of mine and one of the interview scraps I circled was “the soft forest floor,” which, through the process of radiation, brought me to the idea that he wanted to be a kind of shock absorber for someone else in the play, to blanket and soothe them and also to help them sneak away. It’s a way of stimulating a new connection or a new way of seeing your character’s temperament or history or way of being in community.

New Categorically Different Voice

(suggested 15–20 minutes)

After you’ve taken yourself through this cycle several times, read over what you’ve written. If you still have mental energy and time, invent one totally new voice, something that hasn’t shown up in your notebook or writing. Let this one be categorically different from the others—perhaps nonhuman, or nonspoken, or non-whatever the voices you’ve coaxed out hold in common. Or perhaps look at the list of excellent names you made, or your timed write about the voices you were going to gather in the piece (from Day 1). Write something for this voice without any pre-planning—no prompt, no recourse to your trawl lists. To help restart your perspective, write in a language category you haven’t yet tried today—stage directions, dialogue, monologue, projection script, voiceover, phone tree prompts, footnotes, program note, signage...

Wrap Up

Read over everything you’ve written. For the last five minutes of your writing day, write a note to yourself about what you care about in what’s emerged so far. Ask yourself what demands your honesty as a writer and thinker in the thing that’s emerging.

Share

Two scenes/passages that appeal to you, but feel disparate from each other. As you choose them, think about what kind of range or continuum they suggest, and perhaps about other points on that

continuum you could write into. Make notes about the space between them and share those notes too, if you would like.

Response

Make a list of questions. Some should be for your podmate as a writer, some should be for the voices as characters. Shuffle them all together. Give them to your podmate without noting which category each question belongs to.

Reminder not to give or seek praise in your responses. Praise, especially when received early in a process, can interfere with our own judgment of our work, can skew decisions about what's kept and what's left behind, blocking us from perceiving delicate new ideas or ways of writing that still need time to come into themselves.

DAY 3: MUSICAL DRAFT

Day 3 isn't as tightly structured as Days 1 and 2; there aren't multiple iterative stages of many small exercises, just a gulp and a dive and a draft.

Tuning

Before you start, freewrite for 4 minutes about what you care about in this emergent thing. We won't write our musical drafts with any feeling of obligation to achieve any destination in particular, but it's helpful to remind yourself about what is alive for you in this project. What matters? Bring it into your mind before you begin this improvisational draft.

Warmups

(5-10 minutes)

If you find them helpful, choose some warmups from the following, or invent your own. If you don't want to warm up, go directly to the draft preparations.

Word Brain

Choose four or five options from the list below. Set a timer for one minute. For each list, write for exactly one minute, listing any word that comes to mind, even if it's wrong. When the timer rings, move immediately to the next list.

—words that have a K in them

—words pertaining to a trade or area of expertise that shows up in your play

—full names of people you knew before you were seven years old

—names of real cities

—names of imagined cities

—names for new paint chip color swatches

—names for streets in one of those themed cul-de-sac housing tracts

—words whose meanings you don't really truly know

—words that are fun to say

—alphabet word list: cycling through the alphabet twice, write a word that begins with A then a word that begins with B and so on.

Hand Brain

List 7 things you saw in the last 24 hours and choose one of them to draw. Don't spend more than a few minutes drawing. Draw it fast, draw it poorly, doesn't matter. What does matter is that you include as much detail as you can summon in the time frame. And you can draw, so don't say you can't.

Memory Brain

Write down whatever you can remember of something you once memorized—poem, lyric, monologue, famous speech.

Day's Overview

Today we'll write our musical drafts—the first in the sequence of musical, architectonic, and textile approaches. The musical draft is an improvisation. Start at the beginning and write until you reach the end, allowing yourself to be led by your writing's music (more on that below). Whenever you are stuck or looking for assistance, go to the material you have transferred forward from the first two days of work (more on that below).

Preparation: Transfer

Before you write, transfer forward anything you want to preserve from the first two days. This can include shiny lovely things you circled, or whole passages from the voice writing you did on Day 2. You are licensed to copy and paste but be softly selective—don't just transfer everything. Choose what really has energy for you. Try to avoid augmenting or editing as you transfer. This shouldn't be a big part of your time today. I recommend transferring everything to a new file, and then printing it out so you can have it at hand to flip through as you write your draft, while also having easy access to use cut and paste for longer passages.

Note on length:

The piece is as long as you want it to be, but remember that we entirely rewrite it tomorrow and again the next day, so do what you can manage in the amount of time you have to spend. If that means that your next few “days” of the workshop are going to stretch to longer periods, that's fine, but be realistic about your available time and work in a scale that will allow you to actually finish all three drafts.

Musical Draft Values

There are no procedures to follow today. Instead, here are some values to hold for the next few hours:

—Resist giving your mental energy over to story or plot. Keep your head in the weeds. Valorize sonority, image, and local pleasure. Stay with voice. On Day 4 we'll think a lot about shape and story form and narrative structure so trust that it's coming and let your musical draft be heapy, baggy, and gloriously indirected. You may find that a story is emerging, but don't spend any musical draft energy on elaborating causal connections or tying things together. Let events emerge without worrying over how to introduce them or resolve them.

—Don't yet worry about whether things go together—whether what you're writing is all of a piece. At the same time, let yourself start tuning into the way things go together. Try to hold those two directions at the same time. (If you're a dancer, you know what I mean. If you're not a dancer, consider becoming one.) What that really means is this: if your brain starts telling you that you need to problem-solve a logical sequence or reject something because it's irrelevant, tell that part of your brain to come back tomorrow. But if your brain starts telling you that a voice from one place might be really interesting overlaid on a list of words from another, give it your attention. Thinking musically, this is about harmony. Yes, you can play a root note that matches the chord on top, but sometimes what's interesting is the conjunction between things that produces new sounds, new relations.

—Let the thing sprout as many limbs as it wants. Superabundance is a keyword for the day. Let your play make noise. Be wild and joyful. You'll probably toss much of this draft out anyway as you go forward. Don't pause to rewrite anything today. Get to the end of the draft.

On the Musical

Here are some ideas about the music in the musical draft. Think of writing musically as a function of attention. What do we give special attention to?

pattern

- of sound
- of textures
- of thinking
- of sentences
- of recurrence and iteration

refrain

as a recurrent strain of sound
in a character's speech (a tag line, a speech habit)
in the play's ways of opening and closing beats or scenes

tempo

of thinking, of speaking, of transitioning
relative speeds and slownesses of adjacent scenes
points of tempo change

sonority

how things sound apart from their sense

lyricism

the bridge from prose to something song-like or elevated or soothing
also the music in the plain prose, your ear for exactitude

voicing

the way you choose different speakers to solo, harmonize, combine,
the way the play sounds when played in a low register or a high register
(how to transpose the idea of "register" to your play is a riddle)

harmony

as the consonance or dissonance between neighbors
as the sense of landing in sweetness or landing in an open, unresolved place

A reminder

Almost every writer who ever was reports that their first drafts are really bad. Delight in the license to leave everything on the page.

Share

If you're sharing with a pod, here is where things get serious. Share your draft. If you don't have a pod, read your draft aloud or silently with your mouth moving (really), and then go through the response questions as your own interlocutor. (If you are working solo, as with Day 2, I recommend doing this part of the work after a palette cleansing break, or at the end of the day. Don't try to respond to yourself immediately after your writing session.)

Response

The sole task of your response is to articulate what the thing is. Resist giving both praise and criticism and avoid the terminology of "working" or "not working." This is a newly growing thing and it doesn't yet know what it wants to do, what its terms are, how it will define its own success or failure, how it will work. Instead of saying YES and NO, try to offer a description without adding values. Use the following questions as guidelines for offering a phenomenological description of the draft on its own terms, without reference to existing narrative values or orthodoxies even of the shit-talking counter-orthodoxy you-are-so-badass-you-are-my-hero kind. Read all the questions below. Give a moment to each in your thoughts, but limit your actual response to three or four simple things to convey to your podmate.

What does it do?

What are its verbs? (This is a great way to discern pattern, i.e. it loops, it stutters, it soothes then obliterates...)

What are its materials (what kinds of images, what vocabulary, what palette of actions)?

What is it made of? What are its units or elements of measure?

What does it ask of the audience?

What space(s) does it propose we inhabit together?

What traditions or forms does it draw on or make reference to?

What are its energies?

What is its mood or temperament?

How is it theatrical? (In the experience of it in time in the imagined room.)

How is it dramatic? (In its condensing and containing some amount of life process in a figure.)

How is it comic? (In its way of acting on the nervous system.)

What else is it?

What latent patterns does it hold that give clues to possible structures it might eventually inhabit?

Day 4: Architectonic Draft

Today we think about shape. (I've taken to the word "shape" over words like "structure" or "form." They mean the same thing in this context—something about the overall design of the whole, and about the sequence of focal points along the timeline between the start and the finish—but I find "shape" a little more liberating, less imbued with the mysteries of aesthetics.)

Today we write the architectonic draft. Think of this not as "draft 2" but as an independent cousin of your musical draft. It's an experiment in story (/essay/etc.) shape. As an element of this 3-draft series, it will be most productive when its license is taken up freely.

Today we use a few mapping exercises to wrap our heads around what we've already written and envision what we're going to write today (allowing always the adaptive swerving away from your plan mid-writing as something new announces itself). You'll need paper for the maps. The overview of the draft's values precedes the mapping exercises below—it's helpful to know what we're aiming for before diving into the exercises.

Make a new file. You might transfer material copy/paste—style from the musical draft, but start from a blank file instead of editing and augmenting what you already wrote.

A value to hold in mind for the day: compose at a large scale. Today is not the day for line edits or prose tuning or even fully finishing a scene. Today you're thinking in sections, adjacencies, and the intervals between them. You're zooming way back to discern and play with the shape of the whole.

Architectonic Draft: Values and Guidelines

We are working in a compressed timeframe so you probably don't have a habitual relationship to your existing draft, but if you were working over a longer span, this phase would be a time to significantly refresh and rethink your idea of what this play can do; this is not just about making your first draft better. In micro-season, it's maybe the first time to really imagine what it can do. Think of what it does in terms of the experience in time of an audience. How does it act on them? What is it like to be in its room?

Approach your architectonic draft as a re-vision in the most elemental sense of that word: an attempt to see the possibilities and the shape of your play anew.

Again, we're guided in this draft by values rather than procedure:

Experimentation with Sequence and Proximity

Embrace the idea of architectural thinking as model thinking, and consider your play loosely as a house. Sketch quickly in large units: make the floorplan of the house, not the pencil marks on the doorjamb marking the height of the kid who grew up here. Think of each scene as a room in a house tour and play with secret staircases, new wings, missing windows, prize atriums. Consider a non-contiguous sequence within the house: What is it like to go from the entryway directly to the attic and then the closed-up bedroom with the last century's dust still in it? From the ballroom to the greenhouse to the basement to the fire escape? What if you went to the basement then the greenhouse then the basement again then the ballroom?

Think about how meaning shifts or grows through these neighboring relations. Make a few bold sequence decisions/experiments in this draft. Do you need to go to the roof to look at the stars? Did you get stuck in the bathroom with its faulty doorknob and have to climb out the window? Or did you wait for someone to open the door for you? What did you see when you finally got the door open again? Is it the same wing of the house you thought you were in? Did everything decay while you were trapped in there?

Introduction of New Spaces

To whatever degree or scale, introduce at least one new “space” into your draft that wasn't present in the musical draft. This might literally be a different location, but it also could be a scene in an existing location that feels like a very different experiential chamber, in a metaphorical sense.

Conceptualize your Play Via a Non-Geographic Map

Think of this draft as a play in the form of a _____. You can borrow an existing form or image or use a generic one. What's the difference between a play in the form of a rubix cube and a play in the form of a sphere? A play in the form of a mural or a play in the form of a triptych? A play in the form of a dormant volcano vs a play in the form of an extinct volcano? I suggest embracing a cross-disciplinary imagination here—get away from narrative forms (act 1, act 2, act 3, or the triangle of stasis/crisis/resolution) and think in other terms. I like to borrow musical structures (theme and variations, sonata form, concerto form). I've also made plays in the form of gardens and plays in the form of particular art-historical images (a life of the Buddha, with a large central image and a hundred small chronological scenelets). Gertrude Stein called her writing portraits and her plays landscapes. Understanding your play as having a secret affinity in its bones can give you freedom to let it surprise you with possibilities that don't fit the shape of a narrative form you already know.

Mapping Exercises

Exercise I: Geographic Mapping

This exercise takes up “mapping” literally but orients itself toward inviting the imagination to produce new places your play might occupy. If you’re not writing a story that unfolds in real or fictional geographic space, freely transpose this exercise to the images/spaces within your writing.

Procedure

On a blank sheet of paper, choose a location from your existing play, maybe one belonging to the part of your draft that has the most energy. Put it on your map (use whatever combination of cartooning and captioning your hand enjoys but be efficient).

Then add a second location from your existing play, something that seems important or intriguing. Notate the physical link or distance between them in some way.

Next, imaginatively expand each location: populate it with objects, people, landscape or architectural elements. Allow yourself to add objects and people and land/building elements that you haven’t thought of before, alongside ones you know are there.

What traffic or resonance might there be between those locations? Notate the lines of connection and the means of getting in between those two places.

Now let the two locations suggest a third location, one that is new to you. Add it to your map. What are the secret links between these three locations? Notate the links. Expand the new location as you did before—objects, people, land or built structure features.

Fruits

Record any thoughts you have off the top of your head about something new you could add to your play based on the discovery of one of the secret links or the expansion of locations. This “something new” might eventually significantly change your play or might show up as only a passing moment. But let it expand the radius of your play.

Look again at your map. Look at the elements (objects, people, features of the environment) you recorded in your two already-known locations. Think about how you might use their presence to dig back into an existing scene and bring it to a new dimension or point it in a new direction. Record any thoughts you have about how that could unfold.

Exercise 2: Abstract Mapping

This mapping exercise is speculative. I personally love this exercise—this is how my brain works. But even so, I often have to do it several times over before I land on a map that feels right.

First Map

Draw a map, or schema, of your play as it exists in its musical draft. There's no right or wrong way to do this. The task is to create a visual, spatial representation of the play's elements, allowing yourself to organize them in a non-chronological fashion. The narrative-time element of the play, we could say, belongs to the way it moves through the map; it is not determined by the map. Choose simple, elemental images to stand for whole swaths of your play's interactions and moods. Consider the idea that a play can understand its movement as between images as well as plot points.

New Map

Next, choose a key image from your musical draft and sketch out a new possible development from that image, not down a storyline/timeline logic, but in a visual map that moves in radiant directions. You might include additional elements that already exist in your resource material; you might generate new ideas or images. Try for a mix of both. Keep it simple—three or four images might be plenty here. What new images crop up? What existing images offer themselves in new relationship? How do you want to organize them in the map? It can be fun to embrace geometrical figure or pattern here, or a particular shape. What would, say, a play in the shape of a circle be? A circle with a box inside it? A circle with tiny segments? A ladder? A constellation? A classic mandala? An electrical circuit? A spiral?

Complete both mapping exercises and then write your architectonic draft. Keep the two maps in your field of vision as you write, and meditate on them periodically.

Share and Respond

Repeat the same sharing and response process as yesterday. As a responder, give particular attention to your experience of the thing in time, the way it moves, your perception of the thing's architecture from inside the experience of it.

DAY 5: TEXTILE DRAFT

Today we write the textile draft. A day to weave, to compose with intention, and to step aside from the last four day's mode of being the happy receiver at the fountain of impulse and image. Today is the day to bring in our judgment and our care. As you write, be sure to remember that judgment—one of your most precious resources as a writer—is a form of care, and not a form of censorship or an expression of fear or acquiescence to an authority external to your own.

Before you begin today's process—which is quite involved—take a few minutes to ground yourself in a sense of where your imperatives meet the play's imperatives. What is important to you to bring into being in this form? What has the play demanded of you? What has it asked you to be honest about? Where do you need to dig in order to fulfill something it's brought forward?

Procedure

Today's procedure follows three steps.

Step 1: Thread Bank

Imagine pulling apart the two existing drafts so that where you had fabric now you have a pile of thread—the bank from which you will weave your third and final draft.

Our process for dismantling will be to collapse the material of both drafts into lists. These lists become an inventory of the play's images, its events, its information, its places, its songs, its keywords, its objects—all decoupled from the scenes or passages they first appeared in, which will allow us to once again find a freedom (as we did in the architectonic drafts) with respect to how the play unfolds in time.

The simplest version of this process is to gather a pile of paper strips, give each one a heading for a type of material, and trawl each play in turn, recording items under each heading. There are pages at the back of this book /[\[at the end of the downloadable PDF\]](#)/ with list templates you can use, although there's no reason to be constrained by my lists. You know your play better than I do; you know what its relevant categories are.

Possible categories: events, vivid images, lines or phrases you love, characters, moments of energetic shift, patterns, figures or themes, poetic modes, counterpoints or polarities, questions raised, special props or objects, places rendered or places referenced, moments of conjuring, periods of rest...

Additionally, for each character, make a character sheet on which to record the skeleton key to their way of being. Don't be seduced by the idea that every character should possess total consistency, but do think about each character in terms of their habits and ways of responding to pressures, internal or external.

Your lists are a new way to see what the stuff is you've made your play from.

Step 2: New Outline with Thread Notes

Assert a new outline. If you have time, it can help to make a very simple outline of both the musical and architectonic drafts first.

I like to do this on many scraps of paper or index cards, so I can play with order as I do.

Give one piece of paper to each scene or section. On the scene paper, note what needs to be woven into the scene: objects, information, images, events—anything from the thread bank lists. As you make these notes, try to detach yourself from any obligation to replicate the way you unfolded the story in the two previous drafts (though of course, you may choose to preserve and transfer forward whatever you like). These outline scene pages should have only high-level ingredients. As you populate each page, consider the following angles:

Think about how the play patterns and primes itself.

Think about when grounding, contextualizing information is given and how much is needed.

Think about the possibility of collapsing disparate scenes into one.

Think about the possibility of giving lines spoken by one character to another.

Think about the ordering of images.

Step 3: Slow Writing

The textile draft is an opportunity to significantly change tempos, and to benefit from the fresh perspective on care and composition that a slower tempo brings. In the musical draft, we were improvising start to finish. In the architectonic draft, we allowed ourselves some foresight and planning, but still wrote in sketches and with a prospective freedom. In the textile draft, we approach the process of keying in each line as if it is a beautiful, delicate performance.

Arrange your writing space so that you have, in a semi-circle around you or pinned to the wall: your thread bank lists, your outline pages, printed copies of your last two drafts.

For this draft, give yourself a little mental script: read (the outline, the thread bank), write (a sentence or two), read (the outline, the thread bank), write (another sentence or two). Eyes, hands, eyes, hands.

Deliberateness

Let this writing session be one in which you consider every line, every word. You may end up transferring whole swaths of material forward from your musical or architectonic drafts—just copying it down to the line. But be intentional about every word you preserve from your prior drafts. I strongly recommend re-typing every line in your play rather than copying and pasting.

Read the line, hear it in your mind's ear, type it out. Tune the line now; adjust it if it doesn't sound right. This is the time for fine-tuning. This is the time for your editor to appear—not the mean one, but the honest one, the one who takes pleasure in your writing and says try again when needed. Remember, between every few lines of the new draft—this is the slow part—glance over your array of thread bank lists and scene pages to see if anything can want to be incorporated; you might find that something you'd associated with one scene or character wants to reinvent itself in the scene you are writing.

In the textile draft, the space from line to line is the point of possibility and incursion. The instrument is your ear. The resource is your thread bank.

Care for your play.

Maybe the only fundamental thing about a play is that it happens in time. How do you play the timeline?

Share and Respond

Repeat the process from the last two drafts, with one added element: writers can ask questions of their readers, if desired. If you are working solo, take a breather from your draft, and then ask yourself some questions—of you as your own reader, but also questions you can reopen next time you sit down to write.

Appendix: Thread Bank Character Template

Character/Figure/Voice Sheet

Make one sheet for each character. Record the character's groundwork (where they're from, what sources of knowledge they have, how they fit into the order of your story in terms of identity, power, relations).

- What are their moods and tempos?
- How do they show themselves?
- How do they affect other elements/characters?
- What contradictions do they embody?
- How do they habitually meet the world?

Distill your character to a one-sheet so you can remember either ways to let them show up or notice what you're not giving airtime to that you might want to bring forward.

Appendix: Thread Bank Lists Template

Images

described, invoked, actualized

Emergent patterns

think especially about your own patterns of introducing and concluding, and about anything that recurs or returns with variation

Questions

raised by your piece both explicitly and implicitly

Shiny things

little bits of language or action that you love

Discards

anything you want to reconsider from cut material or generative material in notebooks that made it into any of your drafts but that you still like

Events in the story

key things in the story that have to happen at some point

Events in the telling

stage or page events or swerves in
the way you address your reader

Information

anything that needs to be understood
for you to be understood

Self-Interview

What is important to you about this project? What does it do that feels most alive or exciting to you? What does it do that was most surprising to you as you wrote it? What kind of experience for the reader/viewer/listener do you hope to create? How does this follow a blueprint for an experience? Record reminders for yourself from this interview.

Dialogic energies

Taken broadly, think of dialogism as energies that are in conversation with each other, including: 1) in the literary criticism sense, texts (a specific book, a tradition, a story type, an information source, a myth) outside of your text that you could imagine your work in conversation with, that you could derive energy from; 2) countering energies or moods that co-exist in your play or that could be brought into co-existence.

Polarities

if you had to reduce your play to a set of dimmer switches or panning knobs (that is, the knob that moves the sound in the speaker from right to left), what would they be? Bright/dark; overworld/underworld; rigid/loose; familiar/impersonal... record the polarities you're playing with so you can think about how to set their balance in any given scene or passage.

Guides

Favorite numbers, tutelary geniuses, spirit animals, crypto keys to hide