Spring 2004

Review: The Newsletter of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, volume 14, issue 2

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The Newsletter of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas

Volume 14, Issue 2
Spring 2004

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Dramaturgical Debris

This issue of Review is long overdue. Among the reasons for its tardiness is a kind of sea change taking over the newsletter: beginning with this issue, Review will be an online publication. Not only will this change facilitate certain pragmatics of production and distribution, we hope this will make Review more readable, accessible, and timely.

Thinking about and planning for a move to the web has put us in mind of all the different metaphors that people have used for talking about the internet and the range of information that it accesses, from the valuable to the trashy. And it was while poking around on the internet that we discovered another one of these metaphors for the internet: the Western Garbage Patch. Over the last ten years, sailors and oceanographers have identified a stretch of ocean between Los Angeles and Hawaii that is covered with floating pieces of trash, mostly various kinds of plastic. Fishing buoys, lost shipments of sneakers, and 29,000 bathtub rubber duckies. The ocean currents in that part of the ocean keep the Patch isolated and generally stable in location, though it continues to expand. Currently, that Patch covers an area the size of Texas.

We can scarcely comprehend an ecological crisis spot of this magnitude, but we also find something that stimulates our curiosity. Like the archeological digs that, on much smaller scales, find garbage pits that reveal much about the lives of past cultures, the Western Garbage Patch is a kind of vast, disorderly record of contemporary consumer culture: the things we make and buy and trade, and the reckless desire that often motivates our consumptions.

We can only hope that someday a global superfund cleans up the Western Garbage Patch — it’s the sort of thing we’d be happy to see exist only in memory. But as awful as it is, it’s a powerful image, a disturbingly seductive prompt to other ways of thinking about the detritus of world culture, the amalgamated stuff and trash on the internet, and the messy chaos of history.

The Production Notebooks, discussed in the In Print section of
this issue, put us in mind of historical metaphors. Or, more aptly, metaphors of history: collection, archive, encyclopedia.

We hope you enjoy Review in its new format, and we welcome your responses—and contributions! On any topic! As Shelley has said before: we’re still far from inundated with the news, views, and shameless self-promotion that Review really should be all about. So email us already.

—D.J. and Shelley

a word from the president elect...

Liz Engelman

There’s nothing like standing on the shoulders of giants to help you see where you next want to go. LMDA as an organization has grown leaps and bounds over the past two decades—our numbers have increased, in both the field and in the organization, and our energies have shifted from figuring out who and what and why we were to what we want and how to get there.

The world of the theatre is at once both small and huge. Our job is to make the work going on all over feel accessible, see-able, do-able, share-able. It’s about making the bigness feel of a manageable size, and of ensuring that the small steps we make and take feel large in importance, impact, and effect. We dramaturgs and literary managers are always two things at once (at least!!): objective and subjective, insiders and outsiders, leaders and supporters. So let’s be big, but feel small—meaning close, connected...not insecure or insignificant.

To extend this idea of leading and supporting, or serving, we are instigating a few new hands-on opportunities for LMDA members into this year’s budget. They are as follows:

COFFER IT UP!!

Each of the LMDA regions will have $400 in their geographic coffers to play with. If you have an idea for a panel, seminar, lecture, workshop, get-together, field-trip, drink binge, contact your regional VP, and pose the idea and how much it would cost. Each regional vice president will be responsible for keeping track of the region’s funds: keep in mind, if you use $398 on a drink binge, it doesn’t leave much for any illuminating seminars for your colleagues. You may need to negotiate the sum a bit, but a little money can go a long way, so let’s start putting your ideas into action!

PUTTING MONEY WHERE YOUR IDEA IS!!

The second addition is a new budget line devoted to funding projects initiated by dramaturgs and literary managers. We have seen over these last several years how we have become initiators, leaders and innovators as much as anybody—if not more so. Here’s a chance to kick start another good idea. The call for submissions of a project/idea that could use up to $500 seed money from LMDA will be posted online with the pertinent details. So keep an eye out for quarterly opportunities to pitch your dream idea, your burning new project, your emerging stamp, your swansong.

These are only two ways of calling us to action, but they need not be the only ones. Let’s make these next two years about what we can do, what small steps we can take toward big ideas, what big leaps we can take to make what we do more manageable. Let’s talk a lot, laugh a little, dream big, and risk a few limbs.

I’m excited to work with all of you these next two years to make theatre-making worth all the work—I hope you are too!

Review

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Special Thanks to the Performing Arts Department of Washington University in St. Louis for contributing production considerations to Volume 14 of Review.
One man with courage makes a majority. — Andrew Jackson

The founders of the United States had big plans in mind when they set out to create the Constitution. Their notions of leadership, of the citizenry and the rights of the individual were so bold, the world thought they were mad.

Now, in 2004, LMDA revisits the spirit of the Founding Fathers and sets out to investigate ideas that just may be as sweeping and revolutionary as they were in 1790.

Over the course of four remarkable days, in sites historic, cultural and governmental, LMDA members and their friends will ponder the questions of citizenship.

How can an artist actively participate in society? What are the rights, roles and responsibilities of such participation? What does it mean to be “independent”? And what are the practical ways of being a “good citizen”—in all facets of one’s life and art?

The framers of the US Constitution had a lasting impact on the world at large. Join us from June 24-27th in the City of Brotherly Love as we investigate the legacy of Philadelphia—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Conference Housing: Doubletree Hotel on Avenue of the Arts
Conference Bar: Fergie’s Pub, 1214 Sansom Street

THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 2004
Space: The Wilma Theater
“Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness in One’s JOB”

12:00-1:00 “Speed Dating”: Getting to Know One Another

12:15-2:45 Breakout Sessions with Rotation and Lunch:
• Early Career Dramaturgs and Literary Managers
• Academic Dramaturgs and Literary Managers
• Freelance Dramaturgs and Literary Managers
• Institutional Dramaturgs and Literary Managers

3:00-4:30 Breakout Sessions:
• Using our Voice to Serve our Theaters
• Using our Voice to Serve our Communities

4:45-6:00 Breakout Sessions:
• Technology and the Modern Literary Office
• Negotiating Contracts and Commissions with Playwrights, Actors, and Directors

6:00-8:00 Dinner (on your own)
Restaurant guides will be available at the conference.

8:00 Keynote—Richard Stengel, National Constitution Center

FRIDAY, JUNE 25th
Space: The Wilma Theater
“Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness in One’s FIELD”

8:00-10:00 Informal Breakfast Gatherings
Continental Breakfast provided.

10:00-11:00 “Speed Dating”: Getting to Know One Another

11:15-12:15 Regional Caucuses

12:30-2:00 Breakout Sessions:
• The Pursuit of Leadership—In Rehearsal and in Your Career
• Political Theater—What Does it Mean Now?

2:00-3:00 Lunch (on your own)

3:15-4:45 Swap Sessions

5:00-6:00 The Riot Act—Sharing What We Learned in Our Sessions

Evening—Individual Dining and Theater-Going:
Restaurant and theater guides will be available at the conference.
You might want to check out what’s on offer at the following:
• Big House Productions
• The Wilma Theater
• Arden
• Philadelphia Theatre Company
• Interact
• People’s Light

See your conference packet for Larry Loebell’s list of recommendations for “Not your standard tourist places.”
SATURDAY, JUNE 26th
Space: The Union League, Lincoln Hall
“Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness in One’s LIFE”

8:00-10:00 Informal Breakfast Gatherings
Continental Breakfast provided.

10:00-11:15 Breakout Sessions:
• Making Time Work: Priorities Management
• Having Time to Play

11:00-11:15 Break

11:15-12:15 Swap Sessions

12:15-2:30 The LMDA Annual General Meeting, Lunch provided
• Agenda: By-laws Review; New Business

2:30-5:00 Just Like the Mummers: Dramaturgs Take to the Streets
Discovering Philadelphia—Digital Cameras, Souvenirs...

7:30 Banquet in Marriott Courtyard City Hall Room

SUNDAY, JUNE 27th
Space: Doubletree Hotel Meeting Rooms

9:00-11:00 Informal Breakfast Gatherings
Continental Breakfast provided.

11:00-1:00 Looking Back/Looking Ahead—Conference Wrap-up

Sneak Peek of one of the Breakout Sessions
LMDA Past Presidents DD Kugler and Geoff Proehl will be leading the session on “Having Time to Play” on Saturday

DD Kugler is a dramaturg and director. Co-author, with Richard Rose, of the play Newhouse, and the stage adaptations of Michael Ondaatje’s Coming Through Slaughter, and Timothy Findlay’s Not Wanted On The Voyage. Extensive work across Canada in new play development. President of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (2000-02); Production Dramaturg with Necessary Angel Theatre (1987-98); Artistic Director of Northern Light Theatre (1993-98). Kugler teaches dramaturgy, directing, play-making, and theatre history at Simon Fraser University near Vancouver.

Geoff Proehl teaches, dramaturgs, and directs at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. Prior to joining the faculty at UPS in 1994, he chaired the graduate studies program in theater arts at Villanova University where he taught dramaturgy and supervised the work of student dramaturgs on university and professional productions from 1988 to 1994. He did his undergraduate work at George Fox College (Newberg, Oregon), holds an MFA in directing from Wayne State University (Detroit, Michigan) and a PhD in directing and dramatic criticism from Stanford University. He has authored articles for The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism (on O’Neill and Foucault, as well as on dramaturgy) the Encyclopedia of English Studies and the Language Arts (on dramaturgy and theatricality), and Theatre Topics (on dramaturgy) as well as the book Coming Home Again: American Family Drama and the Figure of the Prodigal. He is coeditor with Susan Jonas and Michael Lupu of Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book.
Performances on Offer in Philadelphia

Below is information on two performances that are running during the conference. Your conference packet will include many more recommendations on what theatre to see.

The Wilma Theater presents
**Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train**
By Stephen Adly Guirgis
Directed by Blanka Zizka
Philadelphia Premiere
May 19-June 27, 2004
www.wilmatheater.org

“John Douglas Thompson’s performance in Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train is the best I’ve seen on a Philadelphia stage in a decade.”
— Philadelphia Daily News

“Ferociously acted...vivid and passionate...”
— Courier-Post

“...a provocative evening”
— The Philadelphia Inquirer

John Douglas Thompson faces scrutiny from Lindsay Smiling in a scene from Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train. Photo by: Jim Roese Photography.

The Arden Theatre presents
**Hard Times**
A Philadelphia Premiere of Lookingglass Theatre Company’s production
adapted & directed by Heidi Stillman
in association with Actors Gymnasium
on the F. Otto Haas Stage
May 27 - June 27, 2004

“The Arden Theatre closes out its season on a high note with this justly admired production of Hard Times from Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre Company!” — Philadelphia Inquirer

This original adaptation of the classic Charles Dickens novel was a multiple award-winning smash for Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre Company (Broadway’s Metamorphoses). Now the Arden brings Lookingglass’ vividly theatrical style to Philadelphia for the first time, in a circus-inspired production that’s sure to dazzle.

“As brilliantly conceived as any Dickens stage adaptation I have ever seen. It’s a tribute not only to the glory of Dickens, but to the joy of theater.” — Chicago Tribune

Preview the “Alternative Guide to Philly Fun”

Below is just a taste of the informative guide that Larry Loebell has put together for conference attendees. Full information on these and many other Philadelphia attractions will be in your packet.

**Fairmount Water Works**— One of my favorite 19th century sites, this is the country’s first important water works. Designed by Frederick Graff, this National Historic Engineering Landmark built in 1815 was the first steam-pumping station of its kind in the country. The notable assemblage of Greek revival buildings was not only the start of public works, but Graff, believed that the site ought to reflect the democratic essence of the country. The Greek Revival buildings with public spaces for viewing the turbines were part of the plan to inspire the populace to understand the greatness of a humane democracy.

**Japanese House and Garden and Memorial Hall**— 4700 States Drive— 17th Century Style House and Garden. Tea ceremony during the summer. Call for hours: 215-878-5097 This lovely house and garden was built for a Metropolitan Museum of Art by Japanese craftsmen and moved here after the exhibit ended. Beautiful replica of an antique house. A gem. Does not take long to visit. Also nearby, Memorial Hall, the last surviving building from the 1876 World Fair. This is the west part of Fairmount Park. Good walking nearby. A 15 minute cab ride from the hotel.

**The Walt Whitman House**— 328 Mickle Boulevard, between 3rd & 4th Streets, Camden, New Jersey. Whitman lived here for the later part of his life. The house reflects the post Civil War era of his domicile, and has artifacts and manuscripts. Less a sightseeing stop than a literary shrine. The House is 2 blocks east of the Camden Waterfront, in case you are making a day of Camden and the Aquarium. 856-964-5383. (Reachable by public transportation or a 20 minute cab ride from the hotel, though getting cabs to go to Camden might be tricky. Ask the hotel concierge for advice on this.)

**Laurel Hill Cemetery**— John Notman, architect of the Athenaeum and many other noted local buildings, designed Laurel Hill in 1836. The cemetery is an important example of an early rural burial ground and the first cemetery in America designed by an architect. Its rolling hills overlooking the Schuykill River, its rare trees, and its monuments and mausoleums sculpted by greats such as Notman, Alexander Milne Calder, Alexander Stirling Calder, William Strickland, and Thomas U. Walter made it a popular picnic spot in the 19th century; today it’s a great place for a stroll.


The first two volumes of The Production Notebooks: Theatre In Process, the Theatre Communications Group series edited by Mark Bly, were published in 1996 and 2001. Each volume includes an introduction by Bly and four chapters written by working dramaturgs. Each chapter describes the dramaturg’s experience of work on a particular project: the dramaturg’s introduction to the project, her or his contributions over weeks or months of work, the collaborator’s contributions, and finally audience and critical response to the production. Danielle Mages Amato and D.J. Hopkins sit down, virtually, to talk about these influential books.

D.M.A. What first strikes me about the notebooks is that they offer a response to the dramaturg’s longing for some kind of documentation of the creative process — not to fix it or stabilize it — not as a “faithful” representation of the time-based, embodied process that it is, but as an aid to other dramaturgs, as a record of work lovingly done.

D.J.H. Yes, a response, a record. I think they do two things: they give the dramaturg a “thing”; whereas the set designer can point to a model or to the set itself and say “I made this,” so often dramaturgs don’t have a concrete “product” that others can see. As my friend and director Deb Falb once put it, the dramaturg’s work disappears into everybody else’s work. But I know that I’ve felt the desire to have a thing: translation, adaptation, image wall, book of research, an essay, whatever. The notebooks give a material substance to the often immaterial work of the turg. Were you at UCSD the year that we were comparing dramaturgs to the angels in Wings of Desire? Invisible, substanceless, very well dressed, hanging out in the library, helping the desperate?

D.M.A. Yes, I think we often talk and write about the ephemeral nature of the production itself, but the ephemeral, never-repeated nature of process is rarely confronted, as it is so well here. I always wondered why I felt that powerful affinity for Wings of Desire!

D.J.H. The other thing that the notebooks do: they provide a kind of first draft of theatre history, and I think that Bly’s editing is self-conscious about this function. The epigrams to the first book are from de Tocqueville and Brecht, both of which seem to relate the personal and the historical. And there are really three epigrams to the second book: quotes from Moss Hart and Herman Melville refer to the organization of “chaos,” and Bly includes Suzan-Lori Parks’s wonderful line: “You should write it down because if you don’t write it down then they will come along and tell the future that we did not exist.” While Parks was of course writing about African-American history, Bly shows how portable the phrase is, how applicable to the theatre (Parks’s primary medium), and to all of history itself.

D.M.A. Here’s a question I’d like to put to the production notebooks: who is meant to use them, and how are they meant to be used? Having asked that, I’ll answer my own question. I think anyone interested in reading or teaching these plays in the future could benefit from reading the Notebooks. As any dramaturg knows, there’s no better way to get to know a play than to work on a production, because it forces you to confront the play’s meaning and structure in such a concrete way. It forces you to understand every moment, written and not-written. Maybe the next best thing to working on a production is to think through a production with a dramaturg who worked on it. One of my favorite moments in the notebooks is when Jim Lewis, in his piece on the “Clytemnestra Project,” mentions, almost in passing, this routine part of his daily work: “I gather and read almost all 60-plus versions of these three plays” (1:13). Wow. We read more before breakfast than most theatre artists do, well, ever.

D.J.H. I’ve been asked to teach a course on dramaturgy at Wash U next year. You bet I’m going to use these books. The brief history of dramaturgy that starts the first volume would make that book valuable all by itself. But the individual entries give the reader insight into personal experience and give practitioners insight into, to put it bluntly, rip-off-able approaches to production challenges.

D.M.A. I’d be interested to know if anyone has used the Production Notebooks in their work. How have they found them? What kinds of questions do they inspire?

Danielle Mages Amato is the dramaturg / associate literary manager of The Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C. She holds an MFA in Dramaturgy and a PhD in Theatre from the University of California, San Diego. Her current book project, From Organic to Postorganic: Changing Theories of Body and Drama, explores the ways in which aesthetic theories in the theatre continue to parallel scientific understandings of the human body.

D.J. Hopkins is a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Performing Arts and English at Washington University in St. Louis. He holds a PhD and an MFA from the University of California, San Diego. He is currently serving as dramaturg for an adaptation of Kate Chopin’s novel The Awakening.
Notebooks in the classroom to accompany a reading of these texts. If students are reading In the Blood, say, in a dramatic literature class, I think they could really benefit from reading John Dias's piece. It could be a successful way to focus student attention on production, and off the text as this impenetrable monolith. Scholars of these artists should also be required to read a dramaturgical notebook of a production of a play. How can you write about Wilson's work without knowing how it's shaped? Same for Shange.

D.J.H. I agree. I've used documentary video when teaching Wilson, but Baker's notebook provides valuable tools for considering Wilson's theatre, if not a colorful glimpse of just how quirky the man himself is.

D.M.A. Of course I also think dramaturgs could read the notebooks for support — moral support, but also as an aid to imagining the many roles they could play in the projects that they work on.

D.J.H. So much of the writing is, though formal in tone, very personal. One of the great things about the Notebooks is that in each of them, at some point, the author says something to the effect of: I wonder if any of us has any clue where this show is going? Katherine Profeta's remarks about Geography capture the sense: “In any project built from scratch there's a fine line between artistic and artistic free fall” (2: 200). Such expressions are rarely preserved in more academic, sanitized versions of theatre history (and I use “sanitized” as a bad word, knowing that as a theatre historian I'm one of the people who could write that kind of stuff). I think such displays of vulnerability humanize the theatrical process, as well as, more critically, demonstrating the instability of any final product, be it a text, a production process, or a performance.

D.M.A. I have to mention how much I like that Bly describes the Notebooks as “chronicles” of “thought-provoking explorations” (xiii). It presents the theatrical process as a journey; it makes the dramaturgs sound almost like theatrical Lewis and Clarks, conducting expeditions and sending back these notebooks as the result of their forays into the field.

D.J.H. What an appropriate comparison, this being the 200th anniversary of the start of the Lewis and Clark expedition. I think that the productions chosen for these volumes invite such historical metaphors. Aeschylus and Shakespeare, Danton and Hester Prynne — the historical process is put on the stage in many of the pieces. Paul Walsh describes the new home of Theatre de la Jeune Leune as “vast, textured with history,” and I think that phrase aptly describes these notebooks at their best (1: 195).

I have only one wish for the future of the Notebooks series (I think we're in agreement: let there be more notebooks!), that they could become less uniform. Several of the authors mention the many different approaches they took throughout a process: analyses, outlines, edits, adaptations, sketches, image research. I'd like to see some of that, to see a notebook that conveys a sense of the multiplicity and the “chaos” of the dramaturgical/historical process.

D.M.A. I completely agree. More notebooks! I'd also welcome a more flexible format, maybe even something that moved toward “The Production Scrapbooks.” Depending on the creative team, some collaborations lean heavily on an exchange of visual materials — found or famous artwork, pages ripped out of magazines, weird collaborative drawings — and it would be nice to find a place for this material in the Notebooks. I'd also be open to more incoherence in the textual material, and the possibility of a notebook with less narrative.

I'm also glad that Bly decided to make the success or failure of the production, in the eyes of critics or even the artists themselves, insignificant. Bly writes: “We are interested in the evolution of the project, particularly discussions of the obstacles encountered, temporary aesthetic detours and artistic choices made.” (xiv).

D.J.H. I think if “success” had been a criteria, two of the most exciting notebooks might have been left out. Walsh concludes the Children of Paradise notebook with the company's response to the mixed reviews of their sprawling, ambitious project that connected WWII, early 19th century, and, indirectly, current events (1: 199). And Lise Ann Johnson's documentation of Robert Lepage's Shakespeare Rapid Eye Movement records a fascinating amalgam of ideas that doesn't quite come together, but are nevertheless inspiring. Bly seems determined to document “failures” within the process and not only “successes” (whatever either of those words may mean), and this emphasis on process over product may be the greatest strength of the series.
Know Your Regional Vice Presidents!

Even when we aren’t meeting at our annual conference, LMDA members can stay connected with dramaturgs in their area through their Regional VP. Please feel invited to send news about theatrical happenings in your neck of the woods to your VP. Many regions hold LMDA gatherings throughout the year (often in connection with theatre festivals and the like)—your Regional VP can make you aware of those events. Or if you have an idea for an event, please contact your VP. Below is a list of the VPs along with their e-mail addresses. Go ahead, build those dramaturgical networks! We all know how useful they can be!

**BUTTE** (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota): Kathleen McLenann—kathleen_mclennan@und.nodak.edu

**CANADA**: Brian Quirt—bquirt@interlog.com

**GREATER MIDWEST** (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin): Paul Kosidowski—pkosidowski@MilwaukeeRep.com, Amy Wegener—awegener@actorstheatre.org

**METRO CHICAGO**: Rachel Shteir—rshteir@depaul.edu

**HOMESTEAD** (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas): Kae Koger—akoger@ou.edu

**METRO PHILADELPHIA**: Shannon O’Donnell—srodonnell@yahoo.com

**MID-ATLANTIC** (Delaware, Maryland, DC, Virginia, West Virginia): Mary Resing—mary@woollymammoth.net

**NYC**: Elizabeth Bennett—ebennett@mtc-nyc.org

**NORTHEAST** (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, NY State, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont): (Marge Betley on sabbatical) mbetley@gevatheatre.org, Ilana Brownstein—sparkleturgy@earthlink.net

**NORTHWEST** (Northern California, Idaho, Oregon, Washington): Lue Douthit—lued@ofashland.org

**PLAINS STATES** (Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska): Susan Gregg—sgregg@repsilst.org, Carter Lewis—carterwl@earthlink.net

**ROCKIES** (Colorado, Utah, Wyoming): Amy Jensen—amythystjensen@netscape.net

**SOUTHEAST** (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee): Freddie Ashley—freddie.ashley@woodruffcenter.org

**SOUTHWEST** (Arizona, Southern California, Nevada, New Mexico): Allison Horsley—ahorsley@ljp.ucsd.edu

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**SOUTHWEST** (Arizona, Southern California, Nevada, New Mexico): Allison Horsley—ahorsley@ljp.ucsd.edu

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Review’s Projects-In-Process section invites you to send accounts of your project-in-process.

**call for submissions**

The Projects-In-Process series is looking to foster a discussion that anticipates future work, so this section provides a forum for dramaturgs and other artists to **Discuss** their **ongoing work**. Share your current obsessions, accounts of recent work, and your plans for the future. **Photographs** documenting your project — at any point between inception and completion — are especially welcome.

To start, send a short, preliminary, 100-word description of your project to D.J. Hopkins. Completed **project descriptions** will be approximately 1000 words.

D.J. Hopkins, editor
Projects-In-Process
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