

ACTING CRAZY: PSYCHOTHERAPY, DRAMATHERAPY, AND DRAMA?
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PLAY

by

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Abstract

Psychotherapy, acting, and drama therapy have traditionally existed as separate knowledge silos in the research cannon, although many interrelations exist between them. This research examines those interrelations through the researcher's perspectives of being involved in all three as an actor/director, acting teacher/coach/facilitator, and an aspiring psychotherapist, using an autoethnographic stage play to tease out the general themes. The general themes that surfaced centered on the importance of desire, and its relationship to the will and self; how desire constructs meaning through language; psychology's ambivalence with sexuality; the relevance of *communitas* and environment to learning; the pitfalls of therapy and drama; awareness; the self as an ultimate defence and survival mechanism; veneers and actualization as power grabs by the self; real caring versus professional caring; reality versus fantasy; rationality versus emotionalism; science/knowledge/mind versus art/faith/body; drama as therapy, and therapy as drama. The conclusion of this research examines a host of topics too: how these domains' nomenclature is problematic; how the researcher's self interacts in these three embedded environments; the potential interpersonal, social, and cultural impacts on participating in these programmes; the significance, strengths, and limitations of this research; the potential applications of its findings; and, future directions that are possible for further research.

Preface

The University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board approved this research. The Ethics Certificate Number obtained was H12-00401.

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Dedication

To Whom It May Concern:

Stop screwing around and reveal yourself.

Introduction

Silos create gaps in the literature

In many humanist psychotherapies—such as Gestalt (Harman, 1974), client-centred (Rogers, 1995, p. 166), and emotionally-focused therapy (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988, pp. 29, 107)—clients are commended for emoting (thereby revealing their inner conflicts/defense mechanisms) (Coon & Mitterer, 2008, p. 499); clients do so through mostly talk-based interventions (e.g., word-stem completion tasks, one and two-“chair” techniques, and dialogical encounters) (Bernstein, 2010, p. 514), to an audience of either a counsellor or, in group therapy, a group of fellow clients—an *audience* who believes in and pushes for emotional expression, and the resulting insights, as the route to self-actualization (Reevy, Ozer, & Ito, 2010, p. 514; Vrinte, 1996, p. 56).

Correspondingly, in most contemporary acting classes, students—either looking for fame/fortune (Hagen, 1991, p. 31), psychological growth (Schonmann, 2007, p. 137), or fun (Bruder et al., 1986, pp. 76–83)—are urged to emote and reveal their “Truth” (their most authentic nature) (Boleslavsky, 2003, pp. 45, 63; Hagen & Frankel, 2008, pp. 24, 139; Meisner & Longwell, 1987, pp. 44–5, 68) through a series of imaginative exercises, improvisations, and/or scripts (Koppett, 2002, p. 10), in performance to an entertainment-seeking audience (Hagen, 1991, p. 7).

Similarly, in drama therapy, to achieve psychological growth and change, clients are required to imagine and emote (NCCATA, 2012), through a series of dramatic interventions (e.g., role-play, mask usage, or puppetry) (Jones, 2007, p. 215) designed to distract from or engage with defense mechanisms (Bouzoukis, 2001, p. 18; Johnson & Emunah, 2009, p.

132)—interventions that encourage a more authentic, dynamic, and circumspect self-to-environment relation (Jennings, 1997, p. 26), through performance to a group who shares analogous desires and understandings (Emily, 2008).

Albeit all three domains' emotional push is towards "authenticity" (i.e., a more insightful "self" that exists beyond a conceptualized surface layer), all three have also been operating in separate knowledge silos, without much scholarly work on the perspectives that exist between and across them.

Why is this worth studying?

By asserting their individual borders in the social, organizational, and intellectual spheres, all of these domains may be diminishing their social value from a lack of knowledge richness as they disregard either the meta-perspectives that encompass their spaces, or the interstitial perspectives that lay between. This contribution, however, seeks to break down those barriers: unique and introductory, it will offer a combinatory view of psychotherapy, drama, and drama therapy, from a field practitioner involved in all three.

What do I want to learn and why?

Since I have been involved in all of these domains, I have gathered many thoughts on them, and often question how these domains inform each other. For example, when a participant in my acting class wants to do a monologue that specifically references a "woman who hates a man," am I, like an acting coach, suppose to understand my participant as simply someone who wants to expand her dramatic range? Or, do I wonder, like a therapist, if she needs some cathartic rage release against men? As these thoughts are in snippets and diary entries, coming and going in me as I traverse these domains in my

roles as an acting instructor, an actor, a counselling psychology student, and a researcher, I want to corral these ideas into a witnessing that examines my experience from and across each of these respective domain-silos. I want to explore *where* and *why* the lines between these domains exist, and then offer a reformulation of how they *could* interrelate.

Significance

By formulating how these domains interrelate, we will be able to better understand each domain's contribution, how participants' stories relate to health, the power structures and naming conventions that exist to keep these domains apart, and the ethical implications of keeping them apart or joining them together.

For example, if community drama programmes generally have a positive effect on mental health, and are relatively cheaper, then why haven't they grown as alternatives to the "professional" community facilities? Are professional services ignoring/dismissing these potential services because they believe in the superiority of their knowledge set? Is there any money for alternatives other than "real" psychological services? Are there no systems in place for crossbred thinking?

As clinical services are not a catchall, what do these services do with people who choose to avoid them? For example, some individuals do not go to mental health clinics for fear of being stigmatized, while others adamantly and wholly distrust mental health settings, doctors, and psychologists. Some do not want individualized therapy because it only augments their sense of social isolation by its encouragement of a self-orientation through intensive self-reflection. Do professional services then just ignore these people and assume they cannot be helped?

Crossing between the realms of drama and psychotherapy brings up several questions too. For example, if I find that drama instruction is analogous to psychotherapy, could we still exempt it from ethical considerations, viewing it only as artistic training? If there are drama students who require psychotherapy, how are drama instructors supposed

to assess this? Are therapy rooms the only place where psychological happenings occur and therefore ethically considered? On topic of damaging clients, what exactly is “psychological damage”? This brings up the topic of nomenclature. What might be deemed “damage” to psychologists might be called “finding one’s Truth” in acting. Who is to judge? And from what domain’s criterion are we to judge from? What is “damaging,” “self-actualization,” or “artistic”?

Lastly, drama therapy, supposedly a cross between drama and psychotherapy, is maybe not as therapeutic as its practitioners would have us believe: note, there is little research—the foundational ethical device that helps establish value—to support drama therapy’s claim of being therapeutic.

My Research Question(s)

My central research question is: "Through my perspectives, how do I see the domains of psychotherapy, acting, and drama therapy interrelating?"

Sub-questions

1. How do my different selves interact with my embedded environments?
2. What potential interpersonal, social, or cultural impacts are apparent on the participants in their respective domains?
3. How do any meanings I find relate to my continued participation in these programmes?
4. How do my learning in psychological/drama therapy theory and my dramaturgical orientations relate to my experience of these programmes?
5. What are the broad themes that arise from my participation in these programmes?

My Method

Without consulting my deeper thoughts on reality, life, truth, etc., I was truly fatigued of psychological science and its claims to truth. My first thought was doing a phenomenological inquiry to discover the essence of my participants' experience. Yet, how was I to honestly do this when I did not care about their thoughts because *I did not believe in my own*? For months I laboured, pursing my lips, thinking about getting the data and sorting through it with some arduous grounded theory techniques; I got my proposal ready; I got my supervisor to say it was good to go. Hooray. I was done. Or was I?

Fortunately, roaming about the required readings of my qualitative research class, I stumbled across *autoethnography*. The idea made me cringe: it sounded like a bunch of artists pretending to be scientists. Yet, the idea of not painstakingly collecting others' thoughts, the relief of deleting quasi-scientific, qualitative software from my computer systems, the idea of *really* writing from the heart (and not from a congealed third person), and the freedom of exploring my inner world with little constraint, was invigorating. I thought apprehensively: "Could *I* do an autoethnography?"

When one of my previous supervisors found out, he looked at me exasperated: "Well... okay... I don't know anything about autoethnography. *You know though*, your other proposal is ready to go..." Trailing off, noting my excitement, he added, a bit annoyed: "Tidal, you have a tendency to be *all over the place*." Intrigued, and despite his annoyance in my vagueness, he sent me an excellent autoethnography to consider and mull over as a model. I read it excitedly—very excitedly. "I could do something like this?" I was

bewildered. Here I was, reading through a rapacious account of a man's sexual adventures in a steamy underground scene. I was startled: "*This* is research? *This* is acceptable?"

From that, I came out. *I am an artist*. Even my career assessments from my career-counselling course blurted this terrible fact out. When most in my class received had three letters corresponding to potential career paths, I got just one: I was a "super A" —super-artistic, no other letters, no other interests pigeon-holing me. I thought: "With these score, how can I compete with other researchers?" I do not fit in.

Yet, autoethnography barely fits in. Even my qualitative research instructor motioned to the end of one of her graphics that displayed all of the qualitative methods available: "Autoethnography is right off the deep end." (Add class laughter here.) When I came out, announcing to my qualitative research class that I would do an autoethnography, the reaction was immediate. Under her breath a fellow student hissed, "Narcisssssssist..." This resulted in a familiar joy and sadness for me—once again, here I was on the outside: it's a place I know well and have to continue to welcome. So, with her attack, I had found a new home. My dating relationship with autoethnography had begun.

I define autoethnography

As autoethnography is still a relatively new method, without clear standards and forms, let me first elucidate what an autoethnography means to me.

Depending on my mood, on my sense of my role and my shifting sense of identity, autoethnography may mean many things. I value different scholars' interpretations, and I will take a swing at them—one by one, clocking their unique definitions against what my mind deems valuable in this moment.

First, autoethnography is seen as a *blurred genre*; it “overlaps with, and is indebted to, research and writing practices in anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, journalism, and communication” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 765). As a bit of an anarchist and a provocateur, I love the idea of a multiplicity of intersections that celebrate uniqueness—it beckons the thrill of subversion and denser questions (Ellis, 2004, p. 200). I see my connection with this idea of blurred genres in Leggo’s (2007, p. 191) ideal author who, instead of a writer who “compos[es] a seamless text that renders invisible the edges and ruptures in their different texts... [, the ideal author] present[s] his writing as full of seams that hold together and connect their reflections and possibilities for understanding”.

Second, some scholars delineate autoethnography as some sort of “catastrophic encounter, a moment of vulnerability and ambiguity that is sensuous, embodied, and profoundly implicated in the social and ideological structures of their lifeworlds” (Marilyn Browstein as quoted in Holdstein & Bleich, 2001, p. 177). This is just too much for me: I do not want a *catastrophic* encounter. Catastrophe sounds like a tsunami, an earthquake, or a firestorm: I will not induce a crisis of this magnitude in my life. This is an ethical decision; although I want to be vulnerable, I also want some peace of mind and safety—I do not want to go into therapy from a research process that has emotionally raped me.

Autoethnographies have the potential to be self-destructive, but only if the researcher wants that. Instead of destruction, I want my research to be simply a process, which means there must be some drama, conflict, and anxiety (some of the essentials of life and process); but, I am not looking to “feel better” by the end of it. All I am seeking is the process.

Instead of Brownstein’s fervid agenda above, I would prefer something more tepid but still exciting—maybe seeing autoethnography as a “the kind [of art] that takes you

deeper inside yourself and ultimately out again” (Friedwald, 1996, p. 122). This already feels better: I do not have to sacrifice myself on some vague pyre for the greater good, as Brownstein would toss me. It also leads into positioning autoethnography as a therapeutic benefit; and, even though intervention and change are not its primary goals, they can be seen as its healthy by-products. Muncey (2010, p. 136) notes this to be the case: “my research usually has therapeutic value, for me, other participants, or readers, and any dialogue between my participants and me can become a process of mutual exploration.” Some autoethnographic researchers, like Muncey, view research as an auto-therapeutic encounter, but I see it simply as a process of inquiry. This also fits in neatly with Chase’s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 656, 659, 660) view that autoethnography is essentially a narrative inquiry; that is, a retrospective process of meaning making that shapes and orders one’s past involvement in a significant culture or community experience; a process where I as researcher would turn my analytic lens on myself and my interactions with others, and then write or perform these narratives. The issue I have with this definition is that “significant” is not fleshed out at all. I might ask: is my experience significant enough? And, by *whose* standards? (Later I will talk, in depth, about this caprice of significance, and if it really matters.)

A third vision, which perks up my dramatic ears, has a lurking sensibility that pulls me to it like a kid towards a bad movie. It states that autoethnography is a “performance text...turning inward waiting to be staged” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 199). I vibrate with this dramatic notion; however, the uniqueness of the “waiting” part is lost on me as everything could be staged (and a lot is). What makes autoethnography unique is its inward, reflexive turn that makes it an obvious, silently waiting, performative piece.

Coming to the end of these three visions, discarding some points, I sum up some of their pieces and glue together my favourite parts. I loosely define my autoethnography as this: *interstitially located between dominant domains, autoethnography is a dramatic narrative based on the writer's experience designed to engage the imagination.*

Why is an autoethnography the right choice for my study?

Since I as a researcher will be the “epistemological and ontological nexus upon which [an autoethnographic] research process turns” (Muncey, 2010; Spry, 2001, p. 711), I should make the case that who I am and what I conjecture about reality's nature , and how I come to construct knowledge, syncs well with this method. However, let us acknowledge the irony of this need for solidity that possibly stems from our realist-scientific past. Gingrich-Philbrook (2005, p. 298) remarks that I, as the writer/researcher, will have to “confront the place of personal writing as a producer and carrier of ‘knowledge’ at a time when what constitutes knowledge is somewhat in doubt.”

My ontology

Truth, consciousness, and subjectivity

“It's the intention that changes it from a stairway to a stairway as a piece of art.

[*laughing with a glint in his eye*] Because I said so.” (“Identity: Bruce Nauman,” 2003)

So, here I am, in my chosen sea of uncertainty; yet, I am glad to be here because this space is where I find stability. I note that Ellis (2004, p. 135) wants my autoethnography to be *truthful* for me the writer, my readers, and my participants. But, how can we be truthful if truth under the postmodern gaze is really a conversation rather than a series of

propositions (even if these schemes appear in narrative form) (Muncey, 2010, p. 34)? How can I have a conversation if what I am essentially doing is writing down stories and not talking with others? What is the real distinction between a conversation and a proposition? In both of these, statements are advanced and questions are asked. And what is “truth” if I can never fully capture experience (Ellis, 2004, p. 116)? Am I dooming (or saving) myself to produce fragments? If so, how small can I get these fragments before I discard them as unimportant? Indeed, maybe smallness of truth is not the issue—Tolstoy (1911, p. 28) said, “Like true life, art begins where the tiny bit begins.”

Here are my “facts” then. In this moment (and maybe not while you read this), I believe that it is impossible to say where the objective world stops and the subjective view begins (Muncey, 2010, p. 100). I believe that the world and our experience are, as some Buddhist schools conjecture, *all samsara* (Edelglass & Garfield, 2009, pp. 4, 117, 312; Hanh, 1987, pp. 8, 11; Irons, 2008, p. xvi–xvii; Laumakis, 2008, pp. 46, 55; Pandita, 2002, p. 11; Sujiva & Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2004, pp. 96, 115; Watts, 1968, p. 220). I believe that the “self” neither exists nor does not exist (Edelglass & Garfield, 2009)—and this paradox is just fine and makes “sense” and “no-sense” to “me”. I believe in Laurel Richardson’s (Ellis, 2004, p. 124) current ever-changing crystal metaphor/sledgehammer she uses to deconstruct our traditional validity-truth-seeking remnants that still rattle about our minds. I imagine the “self” to be a lifelong process of becoming whose evocations of experience are always incomplete and transitory snapshots that only tease the memory (Kompf, 1999, p. 12; Muncey, 2010, p. 24). I muse that, masquerading as truths, multiple perspectives exist, and only through the will or power of these entities themselves do “truths” ultimately push their way into our environment. With

these understandings, similarly to my paradoxical view of the self, I posit there is *no* truth and there *is* truth. I know I will get castigated from the constructivists who argue that nature *is* constructed and discovered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 22, 55; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996, p. 108) and that my subjective understandings are *truth*. They are, but they are not. Immediately after the mind is involved, busy with its little thoughts, truth becomes obscured and posited. What I am deliberating when I conjure “truth” to represent reality, reminds me of Wittgenstein and Russell’s (2010, pp. 10, 46) idea about the relationship between a picture and what it represents. When I take a picture of my birthday party, it is not *the* birthday party; likewise, when I write an autoethnography about an experience, it is not *the* experience. When I take a picture, I frame the image (I edit the *perspective*), I tell people to leave that I do not want in it (I edit the *content*), and then when I get home, I edit the photo itself to make it more aesthetic pleasing (I *process* reality through my own filters). Analogously, through autoethnographic writing, I will frame my experience, change and interact with the content (maybe keeping some characters and getting rid of others), and continue to revise the experience through my artistic screens before I reveal “reality” to my readers.

In poking at truth, I eventually run into the limits of language. Can I delineate and make sense of my subjective experience, as Derrida (1978, pp. 27, 228) and Romanyshyn (1982, pp. 152, 154) suggested, as a metaphorically represented reality? If possible, I can also change my reality-creating metaphors to effectively change reality. Similarly, constructionists say that I will, as the writer of this autoethnography, be *creating* reality by writing my story, and that reality is not there waiting to be found. Miller and Dingwall {Citation}(1997, pp. 63–4) were also critical of this postmodern fad—noting that, if there is

no real self, then there is no real world, and so we can create one of our own. I do not believe all-on-this-side or all-on-that-side, self vs. no-self, thinking. I believe in the Buddhist paradoxical conception of the self/no-self paradox: it is created and it is not; the self exists but it does not; the self that is no-self (Edelglass & Garfield, 2009, pp. 99, 262, 323; Mathers, 2009; Siderits, Thompson, & Zahavi, 2011, pp. 135, 256; Wilber, 2001, pp. 60, 81). The unfortunate irony here is that I cannot talk about my self without the use of "I" (and a great deal of quotation marks).

Instead of writing a book on a topic of whether my and your selves exist or not, and the lengthy metaphysical paradoxes that would burble forth, I prefer to cite a Buddhist verse that sums it up quite nicely:

*Therefore, desire and so forth,
None of these inheres in a self,
Because they come into being in a sequence,
Like that of seed, shoot and stem.
So it is that all that is inward
Is informed throughout by selflessness
By reason of concreteness and being
Like out things such as pots.
For if [body, etc.] were endowed with self,
Then, being caused [by self] they would be eternal;
And what is eternal having no causal efficacy,
No possibility of their being follows.
The similarity with pots, and so on,
Whereby our opponents seek to refute
No-self with respect to living bodies,
Becomes in this instance our proof.
Thus, the procedures put forth
In attempting to prove the self,
Are all, indeed, quite groundless,
And remain like a barren woman's son.
(Chakrabarti, 1982, pp. 217–21)*

So, conceding the linguistically useful “I,” I believe that autoethnography is perfect for my ontology. However, unlike Leggo (Leggo, 2007, p. 192) who states he *cannot* “stand outside experience in order to observe experience like a video camera recording an objective reality,” I *can*. How? By sheer will I do. I know my cultural/social embeddedness—but “I” also claim that I exist. Now, some might argue, “How can you do this? Sheer will does not convince me.” To them I say: *You* have not experienced “sheer will”. To convince you that such an experience exists puts me in a similar position of elucidating the colour “red” to blind. Yet, you may continue: “No, seriously. I want this experience of sheer will. I want to experience the self beyond my limited views of it.” I say: I am sorry, this is just not possible—I suppose either it happens to you or it does not. (I) do not know how it happened to (me). (Brackets on these self-referential words to note irony.)

However, since my words will never convince you, and because of the academic pressure and body of scholars that belittle personal experience (scoffing that it is not is enough unless shared by someone else and/or cited) then I will give you some clever smoke that might point you in an “authoritative” direction. Note: these *rouge* conceptuels will never convince you of my/an experience of standing outside my experience. Whatever I know cannot be expressed, learned, or taught—only experienced. I have no allusions that this is annoying. You decry: “Someone *must* have the answers—answers *must* be out there!” But, make no mistake: “There are no answers, only searchers” (Krishnamurti, Moorty, & Bhatt, 2002, pp. 25, 37–8).

Let us bring in the intellectuals. First, Bacon (Coquillette, 1992, p. 32) asserted that knowledge is power; so, conversely, power is knowledge. Power is also “the facticity of sheer will to self-possession through knowledge” (Kelly, 1994, p. 153); so, knowledge is the

facticity of sheer will to self-possession through knowledge. And if this sheer will, or will, or better yet, will-to-power is “the inner most essence of being” (Nietzsche & Ludovici, 1974, p. 174), “the fundamental trait of all reality” (Heidegger, Young, & Haynes, 2002, p. 173), then sheer will is knowledge, power, essence, reality, and truth.

This proof sounds impressive, does it not? Yet, how do I reconcile this logic with my experience of standing outside it? I cannot, but it sounds right and will net me a solid thesis. Yet, I do not believe in my own logic, the “will,” the “self,” the “non-self”—all are blithering conceptions tied up in language and culture, bound to a hopeful and survival-driven organism that wants to live, while chuckling and weeping at the sad lunacy that swirls around it.

Obviously, with this type of paradoxical belief system, I am not going to try to balance objective and subjective researchers in a weighting system to honour experience’s plurality. I do not believe that, “too many researchers have constructed the world as objective and rational and logical, available for naming and claiming and consuming and controlling” (Leggo, 2007, p. 194); instead, I state that there are few individuals, like myself, who do *both* and understand the incongruous paradox latent in my dreamy half-baked cookie of truth. In fact, I find that my truth-less/truth-filled system is similar to Lather’s (1993, pp. 680–2) that “proposes counter-practices of authority that rupture validity as a ‘regime of truth’ and lead to a critical political agenda”. Swooning like a anarchist swan, bedecked with jewelled tail feathers, I somehow always come home to my comfy nest of reality at night—my day filled with gnashing at the kind people who toss me pellets of truth only to spit them up, half eaten, hissing and wallowing in my desire for anything but their tokens of self.

All this talk of truth has me thinking about deception. I could write a pack of lies—I could lie, lie, and lie and no one would be the wiser! How exciting to think of this dramatic subversion! (I wonder if I could subvert the entire process and still resonate?) I might deceive myself too; nay, I *will* deceive myself—Ellis (2004, p. 172) notes, “no matter how much we try to suppress the self, we’re always in our writing. But we are only partially present, because we also repress parts of ourselves.” So, *what* then is stopping me from lying? First, I *want* to be honest because, as Richardson (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 345) states, “writing is a method of discovery, a way of finding out about yourself and your world”. Lying does not get me any farther in my thinking; instead, I would prefer to be truthful, no matter how much trouble it gets me in. In fact, I find the more I reveal the more trouble I cause (and I like trouble—to a point). Lies may cause trouble, they also undermine my morality; so, instead of lying, I enjoy being truthful and do not want to undermine that.

Second, being a sociable person, I hunger for connection. Lies do not help me with that: when one lies, people vanish and hence connections. So, I prefer honesty—although honesty gets me in all sorts of trouble in the realms of connections too, but at least I feel authentic! Muncey (2010, p. 24) notes that individuals attempt “to engage in meaningful relationships with their culture, their society, and other individuals. Like an iceberg, only a fraction of them is visible and autoethnography attempts to increase this visibility to provide a wider range of stores for individuals to connect with”. Therefore, since increased visibility will net me more connections, and since I feed off communion, this sounds fantastic.

Third, beyond saying, “Trust me!” I encourage readers to double-check their need for resonance as the primary driver behind their continuing readership, while double-checking on my credentials through my friends as an empathic and generally nice person. I am not trying to dissuade you from reading my writing; instead, I say this as a visitor in academia where truth, an abstraction of the lusting self, is constructed by participants’ egotistical needs therein.

Self vs. other

Some, like Cooley (2009, pp. 168, 224, 229), suggest that the self is reflected in the reactions of other people who are the “looking glass” for oneself; that is, to understand what we are, we need to see how others see us. This construction, which posits that self-knowledge is foreign information to the individual while not to others, awkwardly bumbles to Romanyshyn’s (1982) view that consciousness is not experienced inside our heads, rather it is constituted by reflections of outside people’s thoughts and feelings. Analogously, Alexander (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 423) muses no matter what we do, autoethnography and “personal narrative [are] always a reflection on and excavation of the cultural contexts that give rise to experience”.

As I believe in, and foster, an individual’s right to stand alone, I will not capitulate to the underlying collectivist bent of constructivist researchers who rally behind any self-nihilist constructions. There are dimensions to this that need to be fleshed out. First, these three views disregard and, hence, devalue the body. Merleau-Ponty’s (1962, pp. 35, 287) notion that all human perception is embodied, and that our senses cannot function independent of our bodies, is simply passed over in favour of an all pervasive collectivistic

and individually unknown “Mind” that deems individuals dispensable. Second, there is an obvious logical issue: What if there is no one else *except* for me? What happens to my mind? Is it suddenly gone because others are no longer here? Third, I accuse these writers of poor form: uncreative—perhaps kneeling to a collectivistic slant of communal self-hatred—they bypass the appreciation that a paradox could exist; that is, that the self *could* and *could not* simultaneously exist. Under this more fantastical/paradoxical stance, I capitulate to Mead’s (1967, pp. 178, 200, 214) belief that the self and society represent a common and dependent whole and that each cannot exist without each other. His is an encompassing view of consciousness: neither does it disregard what the individual perceiver brings to the writing table, nor does it overly compensate society by bowing down to it. Where some researchers might feign powerlessness in the face of sociocultural forces to whimper, “*I* does not count,” (making me wonder if they really sense, “*I do* not count?”), for me, and this autoethnography, “*I*” *does* count, and so does society.

Time

I now believe in nothing I just wrote.

(Pause.)

Actually, I *still* do, but this is the dilemma with time and the changing dynamics and circumstances circumscribing the human condition. Bateson (Chakrabarti, 1982, pp. 217–221) got it: what we tell is always a story of the past. So, even in autoethnographic stories we run into the problem of a congealing past time not being workable for the present. Muncey’s (2010, p. 8) suggestion that “experiences are not frozen in time but grow and develop and therefore need creative devices for capturing the growth” is not critical

enough. *We cannot capture growth.* Under my ontology, we cannot capture anything. We are always just creating, in the present. And while resonance might be a cognitively stabilized emotional and memorial link to time and place that validates someone's identity (Muncey, 2010, p. 22), I cannot say that this autoethnographic creation of mine will necessarily be purposed to such a need.

Even the experiences of consciousness and self are suspect. Muncey (2010, p. 8) felt this: "there is a transient and illusive element to the self, which gives rise to doubt the 'truth' of any stories that evolve". Romanyshyn (1982, p. 10) sensed this too: "stories about oneself are episodic, tiny fragments taken from the continuous flow, over laid with emotion and half buried in stages of consciousness making reality an indefinable concept". And, Jaynes (Velmans, 2000, p. 105) thought of consciousness only as a metaphorical representation of lived experience flowing uniquely from an individual.

If so, if the self is a just an idealistic configuration held over from earlier eras, consistently portrayed as an ideal that is autonomous, with self-fulfillment and authenticity as its key values (Muncey, 2010, p. 24), one we imagine to pop up and deliver a crumb of transient and metaphorical, badly scanned "knowledge"—only to fall back to burbling in its instinctual morass and letting the body habituate its actions—then we are left only with present moment creations stemming from these popping actions. *We will never get the whole cookie unless we drop the consciousness, and the dilemma with this is that we can't get the cookie without abandoning the desire to grab it. Therefore, research, replete with desire, is essentially hopeless* (Krishnamurti et al., 2002, pp. 91, 116). For me then, an autoethnographic creation constructed as close to my experience as I can remember it through writing is the best "truth"/cookie I can bake. Although always sunk in the past,

with this disclosure, narration, and conversion of life into language (Ellis, 2004, p. 116), I find that autoethnography's value for me, trapped as it is in a western conceived research tradition, lies in its orientation to be read in the present, where new creations, and subsequently further "truths" lie.

Performing my ontology

"[U]nderstanding will only flow from your doing". (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2002, p. 92)

As the present is my condition for truth, and that "what legitimates knowledge in the postmodern condition is how well it performs, or how it enables a person to perform" (Muncey, 2010, p. 63), there is little wonder I have chosen autoethnography's performative present focus. And, unlike traditional mind-fixated scholarship, as a performer I will create and present my truth through my participatory and empathic body to deliver a public representation of self through connection so that identification and understanding can be had (Muncey, 2010, pp. 133, 188). By evoking and interpreting performance as I witness my lived experience, I target the core of hermeneutic inquiry (Leggo, 2007, p. 192). Performance will be my act of becoming, my act of truth, "a strategy for discovering oneself by trying on scripts to test their fit, a means of clothing oneself in various languages until one believes what one says" (Muncey, 2010, p. 38). While some question whether separation between performer and performance is possible (Muncey, 2010, p. 205), I do not. Simply compare a bad and a good performance and you will know the difference. I note that if my performers are concerned about representation, we never have a truthful performance, and so I concord with Jones (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 767)—my goal must shift from representation to presentation. Indeed, dramatic instinct will help me as a

performer to know my self, making it possible for me to realize in experience the relation of my actions to my self (Muncey, 2010, p. 40). Note, I often instruct my acting students, “If you believe it, the other will too”—is not this the heart of common truth?

As knowledge, experience, meaning, and subversion are performative, “expressed by embodied, tacit, intonational, gestural, improvisational, co-experiential, and covert means (Conquergood, 1991, p. 146), an autoethnographic/performative text will allow me to focus on, through my cultural subordination to the larger discourses in psychology, drama therapy, and drama in which I paddle, how I have been deliberately using “subtle and opaque forms of communication... [that] are not textual or visual—to express [my] thoughts, feelings, and desires by performing these practices on the page and on stage” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 767).

Since my desires are crucial to reality, and since I desire some safe adventure, autoethnography’s push into unpredictable but safe territories feels right. I want my autoethnography to be a rollercoaster at a well-financed theme park—not a dingy spin-and-puke whirler at some overnight carnival. I want to know it will be exciting, an experience is pending, but I do not want a performance “catastrophe”. Muncey’s (2010, p. 43) view that “happiness and the mundane don’t always make a good plot, which works better with a build-up of tension and usually some resolution” needs some revision: happiness and the mundane *never* make a good plot—in fact, they are quite boring. Who would pay \$100 to see a show where someone is content, sitting by a fire reading a paper while their dog looks dreamily out a window? Conflict is at the heart of drama, the heart of *samsara*, and so, in our relational, conflict-seeking world, in our dramatic writing, we demand high stakes.

Performance and drama are such high stake worlds. They demand much. That is why I take issue with Conquergood's (1991, p. 191) view that ethnography should not abandon text in favour of performance. To suggest that performance should be a metaphor/method for sharing what is left out of our fieldwork and texts, that performance is only a critical complement to the text, is shirking responsibility for the lived moment. It is an uncaring for "the aural, bodily, and postmodern expression of culture and life-world, fieldwork and writing" that points to "the visual, linguistic, and textual bias of Western civilization" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 768). Imagine if we took such a detrimental view on the works of Shakespeare, Albee, Brecht, or Wilde. Imagine the uproar if the average Joe knew scholars were busy with government grants trying to contain his lived condition as a textual reference. *Quelle horreur!* Performance of personal narratives should not be seen as a way to dodge, decorate, or beef up the "real" truth. And hey, what is closer to the endlessly changing truth of existence? Is it an autonomous and stable text, or an emergent, situated, and reflexive performance? To solid performers, unlike the robots at a government-funded theatre, *text* is the add-on: it, however, is not discounted—it is simultaneously irrelevant and important. Performance is not a tacked on piece of decor: it is a central and powerful *complication* that delivers the truth as we re-story ourselves. As a stage performer, I view my work to engage dialogically and conversationally with my community through my text, my audience, and myself to "rename and reclaim experience" (Ellis, 2004, p. 126). Transgressive by nature, I am not a simple mouthpiece of a community that Conquergood would have; instead, like Jones' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 770, 774) conceptions, I want to *show* how performance highlights the impossibility of separating story from its creational context; how performance interprets both self and others' actions and

compilations, which in turn, become performed through movement and mimesis; and lastly, how identity (as subsequently ontology and truth are to me) become improvised conscious—and unconsciously influenced—choices improvised through cultural, social, and embodied guidelines which we have learned through participation, performance, and living itself. When Spry (2001, p. 53) asks, if I am ready to feel this restlessness of history, this transience of culture and these spatial/temporal borders of identity within me, I heartily shout: “Yes!”

My epistemology and autoethnography

Earlier on, I mused on how the size of truth is essentially unimportant. Academically, though, it does matter: size greatly concerns the scholastic community. Foremost of these concerns is “to what extent the experience can be extrapolated for others and how a retort of self indulgence can be avoided” (Muncey, 2010, p. iv). Yet, here I am as an social science autoethnographer getting down to the *smallest* unit (me), dispensing with even participants (except those who happen to be in my chosen cultural group), and extolling the value of the self while other traditionalists try to eliminate it or “depopulate the research text” (Rolfe, 2000, p. 181).

By writing an autoethnography, by exposing my vulnerability and self-reflection, I will have to face a “deep mistrust of the worth of the self” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 15) as a mostly disgusted scientific and social community will brand me a “narcissist”. I counter that, although it is not this author’s prime motivation, autoethnographies can inspire empathy and connection beyond the self, while providing sociological understanding in others that is “self knowing, self-respectful, self sacrificing and self-luminous” (p. 222). And since no

set of evaluative criteria for an “external referent point or a set of facts that exist independently of themselves and their historical conditions” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 37), I will foster both self-awareness/critique and a hefty dose of reader debates and discussion during my writing process to limit the effects of such personal insulation that might hinder the quality of my writing.

In autoethnography, as I seek to critique myself without an external point of reference, ontology and epistemology collapse into each other. My views on the nature of reality, and how I gather knowledge from that reality, have swirled together in a whirlpool that is either sucking in or propelling out a self. In autoethnography, I have found myself to be neither just a *construct* of reality (and therefore, incapable of commenting objectively on myself from the traditional scientific vantage point), nor do I buy into that post-structuralist subjectivity that views my self as a passing social/cultural fad. Objectively, I am: subjectively I am not. To state either intention blithely goes against the spirit of a reality that seems not to adhere to fixed states. My autoethnographic stance as a radical empiricist values my experiences and interactions with participants. I use my senses, body, feelings, thoughts, and my self to learn about the other. I use my experience in other worlds to reflect on my own (Ellis, 2004, p. 34). Indeed, my autoethnography will be an autobiographical research study into my multiple layers of consciousness; it will be a process of gathering knowledge of reality through a vacillating focus—at once an attending to the sociocultural context of my personal experience, and then an inward focusing on my vulnerable self which may be moved by, refracted, and resistant against these sociocultural interpretations (Ellis, 2004, p. 48).

From traditional scientific perspectives, these vacillations towards reconstruction are layered with inherent issues around how I am seeking truth and what the results will be. As a researcher, here I am trying to nail down one version of a past self in the present while simultaneously, as the critical instrument of this study, I am changing in every procedural moment (Muncey, 2010, p. 45; Neisser & Fivush, 1994, p. 8; Spry, 2001, p. 53). This inquiry, and its constituent learning, is therefore in flux: by the time it is read and/or performed, my self(selves), intended audience, society, culture, will be different again, again, and again, endlessly—and hopefully, as Jones (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 764) believed, like any good play, always creating “charged moments of clarity, connection, and change” in a world of “flux and movement—between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement”.

My critical, passionate, and artful voice

“It could be argued that all research has a philosophical basis but is only those accused of muddle-headed anecdotalism at the qualitative end of the spectrum that are ever asked to justify this position in detail in every study.” (Muncey, 2010, p. 42)

I said I would *not* do this: I told the head of my department that, instead of going into a lengthy description of *why* I want to do an autoethnographic research study, I would simply type, under a formal-looking title: “Because, I can. Get over it.” (She seemed curious about that idea, too.) I believed that enough prominent scholars had hashed out their own ontological and epistemological justifications by now, and that my own (which are laughable given that my study has emanated from my personal experience *a priori* to my justifications) would not be necessary. However, when I think of how far I depart from even

these scholars, I *have* to chime in with my own thoughts. So, here I am, doing exactly what I said I would not do.

Why autoethnography?

I chose autoethnography for several reasons. First, I come from psychology's quantitative research world—a pristine and fake zone of researchers imitating “scientesque” reports as they extol Locke's (1979) indictment of emotions: “All the artificial and figurative applications of Words Eloquence hath invented me for nothing else but to insinuate wrong Ideas, move the passions and thereby mislead the Judgment”. If emotions mislead truth, then my research genre is probably the most misleading (outside of art)—it has been “condemned as biased, personal, un-generalizable, and unscientific” (Koch, 1998). Similar to their disdain of me, I look down on scientists: to my dramatic-oriented mind, scientists have always seemed like tragic figures, like rats on a more complicated wheel. Note, scientists and what they produce has a place, but their call against emotional reporting represents their emotional dearth—not science's: their need to sanitize science does not represent or “embrace the humaneness of social science pursuits” (Muncey, 2010, p. 28). Enough of the dry perfection of randomized controlled trials and fantasies of internal validity! We need more ecological, paralogical, ironical and voluptuous validities (Lather, 1993; Neisser & Fivush, 1994); and like Romanyshyn (1982, p. 89), who attacks explanations, laws, and theories to understand people, I yearn for the dirtiness of an “imaginal reconstruction”. That is why I fell in love with autoethnography: it espouses the imagination, and when I think of imagination, I think of *art*. Yes, the dirtiest word in social “science”.

art! Art! **Art! ART!**

Well, now that it is out, let us come clean and stop pretending, and call what autoethnography, and indeed what qualitative research really is—it is art.

(Cue grumbling of Ivory Tower)

RESEACHER

I say this—

(Yelling)

—and you can shake, Tower—ALL YOU WANT!

Being an *art*-researcher, I find that the dominant scientific research voice does not interest me. It spills out success-oriented, eviscerated, and dead stories that comply with a dry and hegemonic ideal of truth (Habib, 2008, p. 471). Nothing ever goes wrong, and if it does, failures are discarded as irrelevant as this Sanitization of Truth rumbles darkly on. To fight this numbness, I use my artful voice—a voice full of stories that is aimed at compassion and fuller living (Muncey, 2010, p. xi) to reconstruct lived experience. And my voice is that of an individual—a voice becoming more and more accepted in scholarly circles (p. xii)—a declarative sound that attempts to unite the Cartesian split by “embodying the experiences rather than just psychologizing them” (p. 63) as it, as all research should, attacks “regimes of truth” (Lather, 1993), and subverts the dominant discourse (Spry, 2001, p. 727).

Lastly, I chose autoethnography to subvert the post-modernists’ hold on qualitative research. Instead of the heartlessness they espouse as truth’s core—quipping that “I is” only a simple effect of linguistic systems embedded in a contextual binding of power/knowledge—I resist by simply: “I *am*. Deal with it.” And it is this knowledge in myself, this *belief* (there goes science!), which I will use to create an autoethnography that

adheres to the literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude, and interest (Sparkes, 2000, p. 29).

Self as process

This self-as-process, inquiry-as-process, life-as-process view in the autoethnographic epistemology departs from the structural versions of self posited by Freud, Jung, and Winnicott. Muncey (2010, p. 24) describes the self as a process of perpetual becoming and that “[a]ny evocation of experience is always incomplete and in transition, and at best can only be described as a snapshot;” similarly, she views performance as an act of becoming, “a strategy for discovering oneself by trying on scripts to test their fit, a means of clothing oneself in various languages until one believes what one says” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). In this sense, self is performance: it is through performance, driven by our dramatic instinct, that we get closer to others, that empathy and communion is revealed. Hume (2008, p. 417) wrote, “the sentiments of others can never affect us, but by becoming, in some measure our own... these other sentiments are made available to us through an operation of *imagination*” (italics added).

Self as performer

I am performance. I am inseparable from my experience (Muncey, 2010, p. 38). I am inseparable from my context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 774). I belong to *homo performas*—that is, “humanity as performer” (Muncey, 2010, p. 8). I am “a culture-inventing, social performing, self-making, and self-transforming creature” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 768). I am body: I do not solely wallow in the West’s textual, linguistic, and visual bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 768). I am a project—“an entity in the process of

becoming” (Shilling, 1993, p. 5). I am a series of conscious and unconscious performance choices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 768). I am the final, everyday application of a being’s practices, technologies, and ways of internalizing modes and behavioural rules, emotions and thought (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988, pp. 18, 95).

It is from this “I”, within performance, within my *being*, which knowledge will blush. In performance, “I” the performer will invite others to understand my experience through experiencing an experience (Ellis, 2004). I do not run from representation or imitation—I complicate it as I move (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 785), through performative representation, describing life’s natural movement and change.

Discussing the freedom to represent and emulate, evokes concerns of personal responsibility—and power. Ellis (2004, p. 208) is no different: she scampers from the power inherent in performative stage presence to hiss-and-boo at the hierarchical structures in place therein. Instead of obviously assuming power, she manipulates and moans that power is bad because it dictates traditional representational performances (ones which use the stage to distance audiences as they speak for them). Like Brecht (1977), Brook (1996), and Boal (2000) before her, she pines for a dialogical and conversational staging that engages audiences by speaking to and with the audience through open dialogues between text, audience, and performer. The problem with this communal/dialogical position is that once an audience is in a position of powerlessness, watching and interacting with a powerful stage figure, any dialogues between the performer, their text, and the audience become situated in a social power dynamic. A performer can try to seek “to” and “with” an audience but, no matter how much the performer tries to even out this power imbalance, an audience, *by its very nature*, has

already given up their power once they sit in their Seats of Indoctrination. The performer might say, “Stop listening! I am really asking you a question! No... *really*. I am asking you a question (*really pleading with his audience*).” Meanwhile, the audience just nods their heads and smiles, unaware that the performer wants to really connect. When exactly do performances stop and dialogics begin? Likewise, if an audience member is intent on battling the performer, they must also sit for a time before the performance starts, anxiously waiting for the performative content’s flow to start, desperate in their need to battle against something; even these intellectual attack-dogs are simply powerless until the performer applies his stimulation. As well, the performer also lacks power, for they are at the whim of the audience: they are compelled to perform! And if a performer delivers a dull routine, making the audience start to yawn and fret, the good performer, sensing this, will soon modify their presentation to increase their audience attention.

Instead of this romanticized belief in shared/communal/dialogical interactions as the route to knowledge, I posit that an attention to the minute shifts in power in everyone’s consciousness—performer and audience alike—are necessary to fully understand knowledge and the process by which it is acquired. However, because this type of attentional conscious tracking is not only tiresome, unwieldy, and downright impossible, we need to accept that some knowledge gets to our brains, through the strength and type of experiential filter we possess; essentially, because of whom we are, it gets in because *we let it*—consciously or unconsciously. *Knowledge, even the most moral, is acquired through its usefulness to the individual, through the individual’s need to surrender/assume power—not as a communal/dialogical imperative.*

Multiplicity of self

Macy (2000, p. 133) notes the conventional self is a “metaphoric construct of identity and agency, [a] hypothetical piece of turf on which we construct our strategies for survival, [a] notion around which we focus our instincts for self-preservation, our needs for self-approval, and the boundaries of our self-interest.” If the “self”-notion is so critical, it is no wonder that postmodernists has thoroughly attacked the utility a coherent self, and that qualitative researchers and philosophers are placing their bets on multiple selves. This notion is even better! No longer do we have to worry about losing just one self—we have plenty to keep us worried about now. Better still, one self can go, but we still have many more to choose from! I suppose choice is the reason polyamory is growing: no need to put all your bets on one self when you can swing, in a heartbeat, from one to another. This desire for fractured individualism, a fracturing that ultimately helps us to survive (and we must ask Macy what makes a “good” survival), is what makes autoethnography so alluring. Here, we have researchers that desire eccentricity (Muncey, 2010, p. xi), hoping (to the point of reifying) “a transient and illusive element to the self” (p. 11). Even Richardson’s (Ellis, 2004, p. 124) romantic metaphor of a crystal—which glitters in my brain like the lovely *White Diamonds* TV-fantasy that late Elizabeth Taylor enchanted us with—is not needed to deconstruct traditional validity. Richardson’s sexy, multi-faceted jewel of the self, this infinity shaped and angled, structured, and prismatic gem is still just a structure (an one that can be possessed)—a crystal is not a process. I accord with her partly though: what “I” see depends “my” angle of vision, but I do not agree that an “I” is seeing.

Some autoethnographic researchers contend that if we have multiple identities and points of view, we could therefore benefit from multiple reflexivities that allow entry into

others' worldviews (Muncey, 2010, p. 23). Yet, can we still enter these worldviews without this concept of siloed "selves"? (Note: eventually, we will have to question the validity of each of these selves too.) I choose the more logical approach that some (Ellis, 2004, p. 739) posit: that is, autoethnographic writing should be aimed at representing multiple layers of consciousness that connects the personal to the cultural. Here, consciousness is singular but layered. Not a consciousness divided into pizza slices of a self: "As a researcher..." "As a therapist..." These labels are incomplete, random, and continuing to push at a realist version of reality instead of embracing the spirit of autoethnographic research. As well, it could be argued that identification, of any sorts, promotes an ethical blindness. Instead of all this labelling and siloing of experience, I believe that we need to embrace the totality of it—with all its half-torn and faded memorial filters of the past that orient to the future (Ellis, 2004, p. 209). This way of being-research jives with Spry's (2001, p. 727) understanding points towards—that "human experience... is chaotic and messy[;]" it agrees with the fact that "facts" are plural (Ellis, 2004, p. 117), and works with Lather's (1993) hope that a more paralogical, rhizomatic, and ironic interpretative inquiry—one that honours our differences, uncertainties, and the power of the "in-between" lying between message and the aesthetics, the process and product, and individual and social, one that seeks multiplicity through unexpected connections while pointing out how "pointing out" is problematic—will emerge.

I hope, through this autoethnography, to foster this direction in my inquiry and my readers' experience of it; that they we both have what Brecht (1977, p. 44) termed a "complex seeing" and what Jones (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 783) described as an allowance for "multiple perspectives within the tangle of identifications and differences

without forgetting the need to expose systems of oppression or the desire to find new ways of being in the world.”

The desire for meaning: Affect on epistemology/ontology

We lust for meaning. Meaning supports the self, and to lose this sense of identity is usually cause for prodigious anxiety and super-pathology. This need to organize the world in accordance with this, supposed, inherent and maximal point(s) of desire, a cornerstone of western culture and psychotherapy, has to be recognized in the practice of creating meaning within autoethnography. Muncey (2010, p. 24) declares that autoethnography needs to be organized by my self-portrayal, my social/cultural positioning, and the interaction of my experience of self in a particular world and the ways in which I come to organize my experience and actions. The goal, through this organizational process, is that I will understand myself and others “deeper”—as “[a]utoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world” (p. 36) through an iterative process of using artistic tools to portray my feelings, thoughts, and emotions to expose my vulnerable self (p. 56).

However, I am suspicious of any external goal demands whose siren calls strive to take me “deeper”. Down which hole am I digging exactly to find my depth? Instead of using autoethnography as my avenue of “doing something meaningful,” instead of all this tortuous writing, could not I just pull fur-balls off my cat, and then talk to my neighbours about it? The charge here might be that, beyond obtaining a super shiny kitty (and a full brush), I might indeed get *a* meaning but not a *deep* one. Yet, who would dare, or have the conceit, to deign to measure my depth?

I dare the opposite: I suggest that depth of meaning, a criterion on which autoethnography's validity rests, is just a red herring of the ego. I charge that the superficial equals the profound in importance: both realities must be taken equally into account. To haughtily hold high one over the other forces a slanted reality in favour of an egocentric, meaning-seeking self—a self that desires the “deepest” of meanings only to narcissistically stabilize its own reification. So, while meaning derived from a narcissistic self underlines the whole autoethnographic affair, I will (and cajole others as well) discard any quasi-quantitative criterion of validity called “depth of meaning” from my autoethnography.

This contempt for self's self-defence value is reflected in Macy's (2000, p. 133) view that the self a “hypothetical piece of turf on which we construct our strategies for survival... around which we focus our instincts for self-preservation, our needs for self-approval, and the boundaries of our self-interest”. Therefore, if self and self-interest are extrinsically linked as Macy proposes, then we can assume that *narcissism, as a form of self-interest and not as simple self-referential navel-gazing, must be an autoethnographer's prime mover*. This is not to say that narcissism is reserved just for autoethnographic inquiry either—it must exist in *all* scientific inquiry. The difference is that while other inquiries pretend that objectivity exists, autoethnography denies it. That said, autoethnographers have a hard time accepting autoethnography's basic root: examine its writers who battle those who smear it with a loathsome “narcissistic” label. I make no bones about what I believe: *autoethnography is narcissistic*. As “queers” and “niggers” have accepted and embraced their once pejorative label, autoethnographers would fare better if it just accepted theirs; instead they try to sanctify the value of self by pretending autoethnography is primarily a

beneficent social tool that re-contextualizes experience through a self to help society. Bung! I posit that autoethnography is essentially a narcissistic device that only secondarily offers social benefits. However, do not for a minute assume that I am selfish or self-absorbed, for I am not. I am, as a *good-natured* narcissist, *self-focused*—a very fine quality that keeps this body/self alive while still being able to give loads of love to those around me.

Uniquely bland: The romanticism of Starbucks #41137

Muncey's (2010, p. 201) romantic call towards an ideal autoethnography that uncovers the complex and individual underdog, to listen to the "muddled, idiosyncratic, florid eccentricities that make us unique as opposed to part of the population" is engaging. First, it excites my ego—by offering to focus on it (and thereby reify it further), and expose a layer beneath the complexities of my personal experience as I struggle to make the my self-interested best decisions, or to survive (p. xi). Second, it excites my ego even more! By treading on patterns that my ego has already bolstered to underline the established-ways-of-being-that-must-mean-Tidal-exists (namely, opposing the research world's dominant voice that does not represent my individualized experience, then, heroically, finding ways to "redress" this crime) (p. 3). Bahktin suggests that I can even find the heroic in the everyday: "the most important events in life are not the grand, dramatic, or catastrophic, but the apparently small and prosaic ones of everyday life" (Grodén & Kreiswirth, 1994, p. 65) (My cat brushing idea is sounding more like a plausible next paper now).

Although Muncey's call to show off my uniqueness *sounds* like a great thing: I also want to show off my connections to my world. Really, depending on which side I focus on—whether I believe I am unique or same—says something about the author/researcher. And

Bahktin's suggestion that I write about the prosaic might sound heroic in principal: "Here I stand denying the necessity of excitement! All shall be boring and ye shall find interest in even the dust that settles on the dust." I believe the contrary—that the heroic is found in the *heroic*. Let's not cheapen the word so that the lack of an interesting life can be perversely deemed a desirous thing. Instead of *seeking* this or that, pushed by Muncey to be unique or pushed by Bahktin to be bland, let me ascertain *what* is there... in me. Perhaps I am bland, but unique. Perhaps I am heroic, but like everyone else.

Methodological concerns

Deception, process, and creativity

Seeing life and self as process, and then thinking about the knowledge I hope to garner from this autoethnographic inquiry, makes me imagine grabbing frames from a video camera, and then discussing and narrating them. This autoethnographic process of a "self," which examines and compiles its own memories, can be described like a computer whose operating system and video codecs (those little utilities that help to interpret digital video) continuously change even while playing back video—indeed, the playing of the video itself changes the operating system/codecs. In this flux of knowing, Neisser and Fivush (1994, pp. 8, 24, 28) see the possibilities of an "oblivious self": a self that is unaware of elements in this process of narration. I disagree; that is, the self, at the time of recollection, can only be aware of so much, and it is only through further and future input could it *imagine* itself to be unaware of its capacity. The self-as-process, not as awareness, not as a structure, is never oblivious; it can only "construct the story as close to the experience as [it] can remember it" (p. xi).

This is not to say that an imagined “self-deception” is not welcome in a purposeful and tension-filled (i.e., entertaining) self-investigation of our role in a context, a situation, or a social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 767); nay, I say *imagination* and *creativity* is at the very heart of an autoethnographic inquiry. Is not it exciting to read how an author self-implicates (Gornick, 2001, pp. 17, 34) as they imagine their “own frightened or cowardly or self-deceived part” (Ellis, 2004, p. 125)? And that is what we do in autoethnography as we imagine how “selves are constructed, disclosed, and implicated in the telling of personal narratives as well as how these narratives move in and change the contexts of their telling” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 767).

If autoethnographies thrive on *imagination and creativity*, then how do we increase them? Some chime in, rather obtusely, on the best ways to be creative. For example, Muncey (2010, p. 141) counsels me to be creative by letting my mind wander—by relaxing my authorial demands, rationalizations, and defences. Stumbling into a minefield of epistemological debate, she offers that the best knowledge is “[w]hat you want to say to the world as opposed to what you are thinking”. I ask: “Muncey, how do we know *when* I have relaxed my authorial demands, rationalizations, and defences?” and “What do I want to say *besides* what I am thinking?” Another example comes from Muncey (2010, p. 142) who cautions me not to be conscious in my approach to truth, but rather subconscious—I ask her, “How?”

Others, like Douglas and Carless (2008), contend that to decrease predictability and increase creativity, successful art-based research must surrender some control. However, if knowledge *is* power, this is a really bad avenue to follow. Still, if knowledge is simply *related* to power (that is, it is predicated on power relations), then capitulating some (but

not all) control is warranted. Could it be that this shifting blend, or juxtaposition, between power and non-power yields the best knowledge results? Personally, my power shifts in direct relation to my circumstances—bodily, individually, psychologically, socially, and culturally. If I am feeling tired, I feel less power: if I am feeling energized, I feel more. If I do poorly on a particular job, I feel less power (i.e., maybe I will relax at home with a glass of wine): if I do well, I feel more power (i.e., maybe invite a friend for drink to celebrate). Of course, these shifts in power are directly related to *how* my self operates in the world.

I conjecture what these authors are stumbling on here is that truth is not in the domain of words or control alone, and that the hallmark of autoethnography and autoethnographic performance is “speaking in and through experiences that are unspeakable as well as inhabiting and animating the struggle for words and often our failure to find them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 218). Nevertheless, this inability, or better yet *struggle*, to express through words or control should not be linked with better creativity. Creativity can come just as much from an intellectual push as from an apple hitting us on the head one day. The results are just different.

The relationship between self, emotions, and power

If, as Foucault et al. (1988) conjectured, the self is just a heartless “technology” that applies rules to its behaviours, emotions, and thoughts, *I* get sad and crestfallen. *I* do not want it to be this way—viewing myself as a Skinnerian rat, tapping at a pedal, anxious for my next food pellet of stimulation to arrive. *I* want to believe there is something more, because if not, my self’s very existence is threatened (not to mention any thoughts on morality’s relationship to this threat). This base anxiety *I* feel highlights the view that

emotions are crucial in “understanding and theorizing the relationship among self, power, and culture” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 767). It is through these emotions, no matter what the state of the self, that autoethnographic texts create their palpability as they connect to and separate from, other ways of knowing and being in the world.

Dishearteningly, sometimes Foucault’s vision seems likely, especially when I hear about the worlds’ atrocities, even some of its littlest: “The climb up the academic ladder allowed me to understand how knowledge is generated and the power structures that are in place to perpetuate certain claims. I recognize that expert knowledge is socially sanctioned in a way that common sense knowledge is usually not, and the various practices that are accorded higher or lower status dependent on how it has been produced and who is saying it” (Muncey, 2010, p. 21). Even when Spry (2001, p. 727) notes that an autoethnographic performance “can provide a space for the emancipation of the voice and body from the homogenizing knowledge production and academic discourse structures,” I also hear that autoethnographic exposure of the self is dangerous, that I will have to be “ready for [my] voice to be further silenced by powerful institutions and to have to justify the ethics of engaging in personal stories” (Muncey, 2010, p. 90). This quest seems tragic and brutal, as though my self will be put in an Tron-like arena of other “selves,” all looking to shatter my existence as they scrape and forage for their own in a virtual landscape of academic PDFs and conference notes.

What, then, is the only thing standing between my self and these other selves, these other versions of reality? Power. Lyotard (1984, pp. 8–9) was blunt when he nailed it: “knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?” Of course, some might argue,

wistfully pretending that power does not exist in academia, that any judgements about the quality of my autoethnography will come only through debate and discussion (Sparkes, 2000, p. 37). I deny this: it is through my readers' power that validity resides; and while a tension between the dominant expressions of discursive power and my experience might be revealed autoethnographically (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 189), and while my performance might be "a site for liberation stories and a sweaty laboratory to model possible strategies for empowerment" as it seeks "to invoke the corporeal, sensuous, and political nature of experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 763), there will be readers who, as they validate my cultural representation, *know* what needs to be decided.

I hope that I have enough power the day I defend this thesis.

The relation between self and others

Autoethnography has been seen as a form of radical, empirical, cultural performance in which an embodied individual (Muncey, 2010, p. xi, 38) and social agent (Nettleton et al., 1998, p. 9)/researcher acts back on culture as a resistant and transformative agent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 423) while being influenced by it (Muncey, 2010, p. 14) in an effort to enlarge their own, their participants', and their readers' awareness (Ellis, 2004, p. 45). As an autoethnographic researcher, I am told to demarcate the line between the social and myself (Muncey, 2010, p. 38): asking what is imitative (socially constructed) and what is creative (individually constructed). As Alexander (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 423) points out, "autoethnography is... about using the public space and performance as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of seeing the self *see* the self through and as the other." From these constructivistic writers, it seems

that I am condemned to being a no-frills social function that, as Jones (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 773) suggests, will create a revelatory narrative that is “situated, fluid, and emotionally and intellectually charged engagement of the self and other,” while trying to get my unique qualities to interact with society’s literary and poetic conventions so that my story can still be understood (Muncey, 2010, p. 57).

Yet, is this self-reflexivity even possible? Obviously something is occurring, but is it really what we believe it to be? For instance, if I am simply a social function operating as a constructed self, I should not be able to reflex back on myself, as anything produced within this construction is just more process—not awareness, for processes do not have awareness. *Awareness* is awareness.

Stemming from my *personal ethical egoism*—where I act in *my own* self-interest, and make no claim as to what others should or should not be doing (Waller, 2004, p. 79)—I point out my difference in my *intent* to do this inquiry: that is, I want only to *interact* with life. Prosaic thoughts on improving the human condition are not only restrictive (in their push for a social agenda—a push which has always pushed me away), but also absurd, given my sceptical ontology that squints at ideas of improving or degrading our collective *samsaric*-illusion. Instead of viewing autoethnography as a social tool, I view it as interactional cultural text/performance—one that “transcends pedestrian notions of referentiality, for the staging of the event is part of the process of ‘passing on,’ of elaborating cultural norms, which are not static and inviolable but dynamically involved in the creation of culture itself” (Lionnet, 1991, p. 102).

This demarcation process also brings up questions of *how* I should start, finish, or entangle my own personal story about myself. How do I explain my connection to the project? As a social agent, should I layer my narrative with a traditional analysis from the literature? Or, should I hide my analysis in my narrative?

The process

I am the current volunteer creator/director/facilitator of a drama class for seniors in Vancouver, a class that I have worked on now for over five years. This class welcomes four to five seniors from around the Vancouver region to take part in a series of dramatic exercises, improvisations, and script readings. The class continually varies in format, but the content is always dramatically and emotionally centred; for instance, on some days we might only work on monologues, while on others we might work on dialogues, stretching, meditations, and view acting videos. Over the months, the participants have come and gone as they please, but generally we have a core group of four to five women who choose to be there one day of the week, every week, for two to three hours.

For this research, I will ask participants for their written consent to take notes on the acting class over the course of a month (during which we will continue as normal as possible). If a participant chooses to withdraw their consent during the research time frame, their stories will be edited out of my notes, but they will be allowed to stay and participate. After each session, I will take extensive notes. In the week between sessions, I will write a journal. At the end of four weeks, I will complete the main body of my autoethnography. As with all artists, who need time to reflect, read the work of others, or rest, I will need the writing process itself to stimulate my imagination.

Please note the three perspectives that I come to this research with. There is my aspiring psychologist side, my drama instructor/actor/director side, and my aspiring drama therapist side.

Writing as inquiry and representation

St. Pierre (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 967) suggests the process of documenting *becoming* is exciting: “Writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery”. In this jumble, combined with my view that writing should have performative quality to it, my writing will be in the direction of a fictive stage play that is embedded with my own personal connection and history.

Validity

I am enough. Self-validity is my core criterion of truth. If others resonate with this work, want to see social or cultural value(s) in my work, want to publish, hail, denigrate, criticize, or embrace me, or it—so be it.

There are four goals against which I will critique my work: 1) The work will be a situated, fluid, and charged engagement that emboldens readers to discover with their imagination; 2) The work will “[c]reate disturbances in power networks” through my witnessing to create an “instrument of encounter, a place of public and private negotiations” (Salverson, 2001, p. 125); 3) the work will “[e]xplore bodily knowing, to stretch the ways in which ethnography might share knowledge of a culture, and to puzzle through the ethical and political dilemmas of fieldwork and representation” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2002, p. 7); and, 4) the work will be deeply grounded in an *artistic* perspective, succeed aesthetically, and expose some of my vulnerabilities.

Generalization

Similar to my thoughts on validity, if my results capture my thoughts but do not generalize, that is okay. I am enough. However, if I am not enough *for you*, I quote Chase (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 667) who notes that narrative researchers “reject the idea that the small number of narratives they present must be generalizable.”

Ethical concerns

As what I write might hurt my participants or myself, I must be accountable (Ellis, 2004, p. 154); yet, while I will seek consent from my participants to take part in this research, I will not seek consent for my interpretation. This “interpretative authority” (Ellis, 2004, p. 152) will allow me to stand back from my relationship with my participants and form a relationship with my readers.

The Methodological Conclusion

By exploring the interstitial/meta-perspectives between and around psychology, drama therapy, and drama, this inquiry will serve to better understand how each domain and their participants' stories contribute to mental health. This inquiry will also allow us to learn what power structures, ethical implications, and naming conventions exist to keep these domains apart and/or joined together. These uncovered truths will be seen simultaneously as real *and* imagined, stemming as they do from a paradoxical visioning of autoethnography that calls into question the ideas of self, truth, and reality. Self will be viewed as the only unit of knowledge, while concurrently being deconstructed as a fabrication of both the human body and social patterns that relay knowledge. "Truth" will be posited as the individual reader's imagination stemming from a will-to-power. The final representation will be a piece of fiction that may or may not engage readers. If it does, so be it—if not, citing the validity of an individual's truth, I re-iterate: *I am enough*.

"BEST FRIENDS"

By TIDAL GRACE

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR/TIDAL: Male, 40s

RATIONALITY/SPOCK: Male, 40s, similar to NARRATOR/TIDAL in some obvious way

MARGE: Female, mid-60s, white hair

SAMANTHA: Female, early 60s, big hair

LINDA: Female, late 60s, long hair

COLEEN: Female, late 60s, with a walker

ELIZABETH: Female, late 60s, glamorous

COMIC: Any gender, short

FRITZ PERLS: Male, 60s, Santa Claus beard and balding

CARL ROGERS: Male, 50s, uptight, in classic suit from the 1960s

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR: Female, early 50s,

TOM CRUISE: Male, Late 40s, handsome

TOM CLANCY: Male, Late 50s, handsome

ACTOR: Any gender, Early 20s

PROFESSOR: Any gender, Late 50s

REAL PROFESSOR: Male, late 60s

HOLT: Male, late 60s

THE REAL-PROFESSOR-WHO-IS-NOT-AN-ACTOR: Male, early 40s

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR: Male, early 30s

CHUCK: Male, 30-40

TIMMY: Male, 25-30

SHAKESPEARE: Male, 50-60

BUDDHA: Male, 30-40, bald

COUNSELLOR: Female, 30-50, very frizzy, long hair

CLIENT: Female, 25-35

MCCOY: Male, 30-45

KIRK: Male, 30-40

DREARA/EXCITA: Female, Mid-60s

SOCIETY: Any gender, 50s

MASTER: Any gender, heavy-set, 40-50

SLAVE: Any gender, very slim, 30-40

SETTING

The setting continually changes. Use the background SCREEN to change the setting as the best way to accommodate fast scene and inter-scene changes. To start, however, the play begins in a university classroom--it is barren, and clinical. After this scene, much of this play happens in the parlour of a very old Victoria home.

TIME

This play is set in 2012. It is winter.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

<u>ACT I</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Location</u>
Scene 1	Knowledge	Classroom
Scene 2	Why?	Cave
Scene 3	Emotions	Parlour
Scene 4	Learning	Parlour
Scene 5	Caring	Parlour
Scene 6	Adaptation	Purple planet
Scene 7	Polarity	Parlour
Scene 9	Desire	1950s diner
Scene 10	Feedback	Office/parlour
Scene 11	Awareness	Office
<u>ACT II</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Location</u>
Scene 1	Power	S&M Club
Scene 2	Safety	Side of highway
Scene 3	Deconstructing	Skyscraper
Scene 4	Self	Cliff edge
Scene 5	Naming	Convention centre
Scene 6	Naming II	Convention centre
Scene 7	Veneer	Parlour
Scene 8	Faith	Church hall

NOTES

1. When a switch occurs between NARRATOR and TIDAL, it must be obvious that the character is differentiated by staging or acting.
2. When CLINICAL SUPERVISOR, TOM CLANCY, TOM CRUISE appear, they do so on the SCREEN.
3. When FREUD, ROGERS, or FRITZ PERLS appear, they do so on the oversized MONITOR attached to a mannequin as its head.

ACT I

KNOWLEDGE

(MUSIC: Beginning of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody": "IS THIS THE REAL LIFE, IS THIS JUST FANTASY, CAUGHT IN A LANDSLIDE, NO ESCAPE FROM REALITY" (pp. 35-36))

TOM CLANCY

I am an actor playing Tom Clancy. Here is my quote: "The difference between fiction and reality? Fiction has to make sense." Thank you. Very much.

(SCREEN: (Clancy, 2000))

NARRATOR

What's the difference between real life and acting? The answer is easy and hard. Easy, because if one thinks about real life as just events that do not take place on a stage or a film set, then it is very simple to cleave perception based on location. The question is hard because it is profound--it lurks in an impossibly dense, ontological deep-end. If one believes that real life constitutes those moments situated in reality, and acting moments are those belonging to fantasy, one then has to examine what constitutes this conceptual divide between fantasy and reality. For example, when does performative fantasy begin?

COMIC

When I yell ACTION!

NARRATOR

Or does fantasy begin when the actor is rehearsing at home, off that fantastically-located stage, without his illusion-seeking audience?

ACTOR

(On a couch, beside a phone.)

I am going to get that gig. I can feel it. This is my break. I will be the fourth understudy and, if

all goes well, I might become the third! To be or not to...

(Pause)

Dammit. I should've been a lawyer. Mom was right.

NARRATOR

Within a non-performative reality--you know, the "real" world--if such a reality does or could exist--do we believe a person who lectures to students *is* a professor?

(Enter PROFESSOR wearing a T-shirt saying: "Professor".)

PROFESSOR

I *am* a professor.

(Enter REAL PROFESSOR enters wearing T-shirt saying: "The REAL Professor".)

REAL PROFESSOR

No, you are an actor.

PROFESSOR

No. Seriously, my character's name is Professor.

REAL PROFESSOR

Yes, but you are not a *real* professor, therefore you are not. I, however, am. See my title here. It's on the script too.

PROFESSOR

If only I could find one more person to believe me, then I would have reality on my side.

(Enter a real professor, not an actor.)

THE REAL-PROFESSOR-WHO-IS-NOT-AN-ACTOR

(Reading from a script robotically.
SCREEN: The script he is reading.)

Stop! I am the real professor. You are both phonies. You are actors. I am real.

(Enter ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, wearing a T-shirt saying: "Associate Professor," about to speak.)

COMIC

Shhh! You don't count!

NARRATOR

It just gets worse the more one examines this arbitrary cleavage between reality and fantasy. So, what *is* real? Platonian realists say that an actual reality exists outside of our perceptions.

COMIC

(Off-stage, on a loudspeaker)

Thanks Mr. Brain and Ms. Mind. Because of Plato's brilliance, you are not needed for this part of reality.

(Enter HOLT with any heavy-accent of any European descent.

SCREEN: (Holt, 1912))

HOLT

Mind? Brain? I reject this epistemological dualism. Our nervous system is simply a selection machine. It tosses stimuli into our consciousness through a variety of neurologically based selection processes.

COMIC

Water please.

NARRATOR

What about the other realists? Take Whitehead, for instance. He came up with *organic realism* and this idea of concrescence--it means that reality is a process, a "growing together of the present through a consense of subjective forms."

(SCREEN: (Agar, 1936))

COMIC

Whoa.

NARRATOR

And much later, we have neo-realists like Minsky. In his *Society of Mind* he suggests that multiple

individual agents of consciousness exist within any subjective construction.

(SCREEN: (Minsky, 1988, p. 40))

COMIC

Realists have become anti-realists, great.

NARRATOR

Smacks of constructivism, doesn't it? Where the terms reality and fantasy are redundant, communally determined terms: where reality is defined by democracy. This also means that there's no actual distinction between "acting" or "real life" either, except that determined by a crowd of two or more. Let's sum up our knowledge of reality in an ironic scene.

(Enter CHUCK and TIMMY. CHUCK has a ball.)

CHUCK

This is a ball, Timmy.

TIMMY

I believe you Chuck. That's a ball.

CHUCK

And this is a stage play, Timmy.

TIMMY

I accept that too. This is a stage play.

CHUCK

This scene we are playing right now is real, Timmy.

TIMMY

Ok. Hmm... That's a little weird, but, ok, I buy that. This... this is real.

CHUCK

I like you, Timmy. You are very agreeable.

TIMMY

I like you too. Daddy?

(Fade out CHUCK and TIMMY.)

NARRATOR

Now that reality and fantasy are merged, let's dispense with all this epistemological bull and move to that simpler idea: that is, reality is location sensitive. "Off-stage" can replace "real life" and "on-stage" can replace "fantasy" or "acting". But, these words aren't great: my theatre background is showing. Let's use *non-performing* and *performing* so the film people don't get angry.

SHAKESPEARE

All of life's a stage though.

NARRATOR

Ah Shakespeare. Perfect timing! Yes, yes! Everyone is *always* performing, always aware of their audience.

SHAKESPEARE

Even if the audience is just their own mind. I do great soliloquies by the way. You should pay me...

NARRATOR

Pay you? Hold up! What if I pay the people who are performing? That would make them *real* actors!

SHAKESPEARE

Who pays actors?

NARRATOR

Hmm... that's true. Well, what if they read from a script? *That's* acting!

SHAKESPEARE

PowerPoint presentations with notes.

NARRATOR

How do you know about PowerPoint...? Right, you're not really Shakespeare. Okay, what about if they're on a stage?

SHAKESPEARE

Some performances have no stage.

COMIC

What if you filmed me? Would I be an actor?

TOM CLANCY

Are you an "actor" if your mother shoots a video of you at your birthday party?

TOM CRUISE

What about me? I'm Tom Cruise. I'm a professional actor. I have an agent.

SHAKESPEARE

Are you always acting?

TOM CRUISE

Depends which bar I am at.

NARRATOR

Okay. Let's focus on being real. How about careers: *real* careers like being a psychologist? What if you are doing psychotherapy with a client--now *that's* real!

COMIC

What if you are not a real therapist?

TOM CRUISE

Like a student, but your client thinks you're a therapist!

SHAKESPEARE

What if they know you are a student but think they're doing therapy anyway?

TOM CLANCY

What if you don't think they need therapy but you give it to them--then whose acting?

SHAKESPEARE

Bravo! I see a book!

NARRATOR

Stop! Stop! I just need a simple explanation of reality. DEAD simple.

BUDDHA

Our need for solidity harbours our essential fear.

TOM CLANCY

That's good!

COMIC

I'm feeling that!

SHAKESPEARE

Love the red sash, Bood.

NARRATOR

Stop it! All of you!!! Okay, what about this: particular locations, like being or not being on a stage, and a shared belief about who is or not an actor. Hunh? *That* gives me an easier grasp on reality.

TOM CLANCY

Not exactly a thriller.

COMIC

Definitely not a comedy.

SHAKESPEARE

Dulled manifestations of cow skulls;
Be pleasant, showing things as they are, not what they are not.
Wishing minds burdened by not *being*.
Show them different, and taste loneliness and rot.

BUDDHA

What he said.

(MUSIC: ALANIS MORISSETTE'S
"Magical Child" (*Alanis Morissette*
- *Magical Child*, 2012). Lights
fade.)

WHY?

(A DARK CAVE, DRIPPING SOUNDS.
ENTER NARRATOR.)

NARRATOR

My desire, which infuses this play, is to examine
desire.

COMIC

Chasing your own ass...

NARRATOR

The chase is key, and Art deepens it. I took
drama, because I am drawn to the excitement of its
bodily, instinctual, sexual, and mental explosions
and mysteries. Then I took a Masters in
counselling psychology thinking I would better
understand how this body/think worked. But I was
wrong: counselling psychology was disconnected
from the body--the body was too frank, too animal,
too honest. But the connections between drama and
therapy were obvious to me. Next, I thought of
dramatherapy, until I realized it was just acting
classes with poor research. Imperfect all of them,
but they all had pieces. I could see connections,
but they all remained distinct.

CAVE FADES.
MUSIC: DAVIE BOWIE SINGS:
"KEEP ME RUNNING, RUNNING
SCARED" FROM SCARY
MONSTER (*David Bowie -
Scary Monsters*, 2008).
SET: CLASSROOM.

(TIDAL and sits. PROFESSOR shows
the end of a couple's therapy
video.)

PROFESSOR

If they resolved these issues through
communication, gaining insight, they would
position themselves into a more adaptive
relationship.

TIDAL

I didn't get a sense that they actually wanted to fuck. There was no sexual chemistry between them. They're like dead fish.

PROFESSOR

Well, umm, EFT is not about sexual attraction. What it looks at is the relational context of the couple, how they talk to each other... We don't cover sex in EFT.

TIDAL

But sex is vital to human relationships.

PROFESSOR

Um, I think there is some sort of power game going on here, so... I am going to stop this conversation. Moving on... Anyone else?

NARRATOR

Sex makes professors shut down. Why? Was our Judaeo-Christian biased society still infecting my education? There's a deep desire to contain our terrifying bodies at these schools of higher learning...

(TIDAL in class with PROFESSOR)

PROFESSOR

Thoughts on how Freud would have viewed Jung's ideas here?

TIDAL

He would have been critical of Jung because didn't they have some sort of sexual relationship that went sour?

PROFESSOR

(Nervous, shifting through notes)

No. They did not. That is ridiculous. Anyone else? That is just nonsense. Nonsense. Anyone?

TIDAL

But I was just reading about this in a paper from the University of Washington...

PROFESSOR

They did not. They did not! That is ridiculous.
Next topic. So, let's talk about ethics. Anyone?

CLASSROOM SCENE FADES.

LIGHTS ON CAVE AGAIN.

NARRATOR

Limits revealed. What's acceptable? Look at the optics: I'm in a counselling psychology department without a sexuality course! Professors: sex exists! So does my body, and all of its glorious entrails! I am dirty: full of gas, blood, and poo. Human. Burping, drooling, spitting, farting...

COMIC

Orgasmically fucking glorious monkey machines!

RATIONALITY

God, no!

NARRATOR

Yes! And there's nothing wrong! Our bodies our fine--nothing to be ashamed of.

RATIONALITY

So dirty. So much dirt.

NARRATOR

I enjoy my body and its mental connections. Here, in my dark cave, which you share and despise, I will examine the threads of drama and therapy, weaving a nature of the self, reality, fantasy, love...

RATIONALITY

Love has no place in psychology.

NARRATOR

Not *real* love. Psychology is stuck with you, Rationality: the atomizer of existence into meaningless separations.

RATIONALITY

That's what I know.

NARRATOR

Wisdom isn't in separation! The human experience
can't be looked at. It's un-probeable. It just is!

RATIONALITY

I will find it!

NARRATOR

You never lost it!

(Blackout.)

EMOTIONS

(Parlour. NARRATOR and COMIC sit.

SCREEN: "Feelings are not supposed to be logical. Dangerous is the man who has rationalized his emotions. -- David Borenstein" (Genn, 2012))

NARRATOR

Emotion or thought?

COMIC

(With a chicken and a large egg.)

Chicken or egg?

NARRATOR

Chicken. Babies have no vocabulary or self to think: just emotionally-triggered amygdala responses to stimuli.

(Enter RATIONALITY)

RATIONALITY

You solved it.

NARRATOR

Not solved. Believed.

RATIONALITY

How come you don't trust me?

NARRATOR

You lie. You're just the tip of an iceberg of emotions, thoughts, desires... What do you want? Who are you? You're a mirage leading nowhere, a stranger dressed as a friend, trying to make me believe you, just before you disappear again, only to reappear with a different face. Id is my real friend: she may be mysterious, but she's versatile, profound, sexy, and virtuous: she dwarfs you.

(SCREEN: (Grotstein, 2000, p. xvi))

RATIONALITY

She's a good friend of mine. We consult. Don't your actors want her to be a friend too? To read lines and scripts emotionally...

NARRATOR

Not read with emotions: to emote while reading. A script is a veneer that structures our emotional world into our selves.

SCREEN: "All of our
actions take their hue
from the complexion of
the heart, as landscapes
their variety from
light.—Francis Bacon"
(Krieger, 2002)

RATIONALITY

Why don't they just scream if they don't need me?

NARRATOR

It's too scary to fully let the id out around you and your penchant for social veneers. Art grounds. It structures the self into existence, allowing us to *know thy self*. Knowledge about being human, the fundamental query into existence and behaviour? *Why?* A question at psychology's heart... that question is the self creating itself. But society stops the self by curtailing emotions. Men: don't cry. Women: don't get angry. This tension creates anxiety, depression. Society is great for the therapy business—it creates and sustains it.

RATIONALITY

Talk with a therapist then...

NARRATOR

That's the problem: "Do you feel bad? Let's talk!" Therapy encourages emotional response, but its a reflected response--the emotions revealed are reactions to thoughts pinging off buried fears. The core emotion remains concealed under the id. But drama dismisses this word play: it's direct, pointed at our emotional world's heart.

(Enter SAMANTHA.)

SAMANTHA

Drama gets me out of my head. Sometimes I just worry and worry, endlessly spinning. My crushing headaches. Ow. I can't stop thinking. I am paralyzed. Disconnection hurts. WHAT am I thinking?! Ow...

RATIONALITY

Panic attack? Take some anxiolytics.

TIDAL

No! The problem isn't thinking; the problem is not letting the thinking connect to emotions and the body. Thinking is the emotions' surface. Obscure this surface with drugs and corrupt your emotional destiny.

RATIONALITY

Destiny? You are running a cult of emotionality.

(Enter MARGE.)

MARGE

I was never an emotional person, but now that I have been acting, I like getting to my emotions. It's a combination of being pulled and me wanting to release. Sometimes, I'm not ready though: I don't want to let them out.

(Enter DESIREE.)

DESIREE

If I keep it all in, I'd go crazy.

NARRATOR

The letting out is the self-revealing. Marge, when you *went there* in your monologue, when you let go, when you let your emotions out, how did that feel?

MARGE

I felt like I was no longer acting.

NARRATOR

Emotional expression breaks patterns: it gives new, or rarely used, ways to interact. Without judgment, without threat, actors can emotionally play with their world, rather than replaying

habitual cognitive thoughts and behavioural patterns.

RATIONALITY

No soul, just patterns?

NARRATOR

Always bringing up the soul, hmm? God knows what you'd do if you found it. Why not *soulful* patterns? In drama, we connect with other souls... patterns. The feeling of *communitas* when you emotionally express: that's critical. Without community, you are acting in a mirror, incapable of being other-accepted. Being other-accepted is human: it's self-help's forgotten piece--self-acceptance is lonely without others. We are embedded in an environment that needs to be as nurturing as we expect of ourselves. And if that environment is not, like ours which is driven towards commercialization...

RATIONALITY

Getting down to some brass tacks again?

NARRATOR

Therapy's relationship to society, it's commercial focus and lack of spiritualism, must be questioned.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Therapy might be a commercial enterprise but it still delivers benefits. Like drama, we get clients to express themselves emotionally.

NARRATOR

From what I've seen, its emotional vampirism: counsellors push and create a trauma-based re-telling of a client's story in the client's head to manipulate them into focusing on how tragic their lives "are".

FADE STUDIO. LIGHTS UP ON
TINY THERAPIST OFFICE.
COUNSELLOR AND CLIENT
APPEAR OPPOSITE EACH IN
TINY CHAIRS.

COUNSELLOR
Tell me more about that.

CLIENT
About my mom?

COUNSELLOR
Yes.

CLIENT
I feel like I've already talked about her.

(SCREEN: COUNSELLOR writing a note
on a notepad: "Resisting")

COUNSELLOR
And you don't want to talk about her anymore...

CLIENT
Well, no... But...

COUNSELLOR
What would it be like to talk about your mother a
bit more?

CLIENT
A bit sad.

(SCREEN: The COUNSELLING TEAM lean
forward watching the session
video.)

COUNSELLING TEAM
Go for it! She's going to cry. Almost there...

COUNSELLOR
Maybe, I could say, it's a lot sad?

CLIENT
Yes, because she was... Never there for me.

COUNSELLOR
Do you want a tissue?

COUNSELLING TEAM
(Members shouting in sequence)
Hooray! Bingo! Whoo hoo! Cry baby!

NARRATOR

However, put that same client on a different stage, and the same "obviously" emotional story has no effect.

HOUSE PARTY.
VERY LOUD MUSIC.
PARTYGOES IS THERE
DANCING.
CLIENT ENTERS.

CLIENT

My mother and I? It's sad, but I don't care about it anymore.

PARTYGOER
(Over the music)

You what??

CLIENT

I don't care about it anymore. I think my counsellor does though.

PARTYGOER

What?? Cheetos?

CLIENT

I said my counsellor can't stop talking about it. She wants me to cry! Maybe I will, just to shut her up!

PARTYGOER

Shut up?? Great idea! Let's dance!! Another beer?

CLIENT

Awesome!

LIGHTS DOWN ON CLIENT AND
PARTYGOER DANCING. LIGHTS
UP ON PARLOUR.

NARRATOR

The counselling room is a stage that evokes emotionalism, where the actors are expected to emote. Combine this with societal expectations of therapy and therapists' compliance to make the situation's seriousness "obvious" through directing the scene--quiet waiting rooms, grey

walls, moody lighting, and dreary, understanding, Mother Theresa gazes. When the client finally emotes, the triumphant therapist feels brilliant. But it's just a scene.

RATIONALITY

Are you just acting as a therapist?

NARRATOR

Yes--but a good one, for I believe it, just like my client. The scene is so good that no one sees it. We're back to what is real, aren't we?

RATIONALITY

Yet, some clients arrive with real tears...

(Enter COMIC crying.)

NARRATOR

And when they do, they think of a place that can *accommodate* them: that is, fit their scene. Though sad, they want to feel like their sadness belongs, maybe even rewarded. Enter the therapist: "Great work!" Do clients only visit a trauma until it resolves? No, they only visit till it becomes *boring*. It's my stimulus excitement theory: the trauma's memory, still seen as dangerous, creates excitement and anxiety. When the danger wanes, the excitement wanes, and boredom sets in.

FRITZ PERLS

The Gestalt cycle completes. Anxiety as excitement.

NARRATOR

Excitement has no valence until our mind decides it so; and, emotions excite more than thoughts. Therapy excites, creates desire, and leads clients to connect therapy with excitement; but, therapy does not release emotions "from" clients--it is released between and within the therapeutic relationship. The therapeutic scene's interactional drama is its genesis.

RATIONALITY

The drama of therapy. The therapy of drama.

NARRATOR

Unwell clients--like dangerous actors with no third-party awareness--are completely lost in their stuff, their selves: they try to fulfill the scene's requirements and neither can switch into novel behaviours. Both use their energy and anxiety to unconsciously behave; they cry, revolt, aggress, repress, act out...

(MUSIC: *Raga Pura Dhanashri* (Horn, 2010). MARGE and LINDA begin to yell, moan, and arc their backs like they are baying at the moon.)

NARRATOR

Great actors, like well clients, are lost in the moment but not in themselves: they have a third party observer.

(To Marge)

Still here?

MARGE

(Breaking from her scene.)

Absolutely. Never left. Looks good though, eh?

(She returns to yelling.)

RATIONALITY

Shouldn't they be found?

NARRATOR

No! That's the revelation: if life's mystery is never revealed, how can one be ever found? Remain lost. Accept it.

RATIONALITY

You're down on therapy for setting a scene and delivering emotions, but drama does exactly that!

NARRATOR

I just don't *buy* therapeutic scenes--and it's not just because they're so badly directed, acted, and written. It's that the directors and actors don't even realize what they're doing--*they* buy it; they think it's substantive. Drama knows it creates scenes. Therapy does not: it takes what it does as reality and drama as fantasy.

(LINDA and MARGE continue to dance and scream. They laugh, they cry, they shake their fists at the sky. CLIENT sees them, stops crying, and approaches them slowly, one arm pointing at them.)

CLIENT

I want that.

COUNSELLOR

It looks interesting. I agree. But, I think you should come back here. Let's talk a little more.

CLIENT

I want to dance... With them.

COUNSELLOR

Me too... but, let's talk some more. That is kind of odd. Freaky.

CLIENT

I am going to dance... I want to dance...

COUNSELLOR

Stay away from them. You need to talk... To ME!!! Talk to MEEEE!!

(CLIENT dancing with LINDA and MARGE.)

CLIENT

(Yelling)

This is for you Mom! I love you mom! I hate you mom! I... I... I... Turn... Turn... Oh! Who are you? Who are you?! Wow! Now this is therapy!

(COUNSELLOR collapses and backs away. Voiceless, in panic.)

RATIONALITY

What would you say if I told you that you like to get people worked up because you are projecting your own fight response in relation to your anxiety over your own fears about death and groundlessness! Drama is your temporary cure for your existential angst!

(Music ends abruptly. All actors
fall to the ground.)

NARRATOR

In this moment, I would say you are correct. For me, emotions are more real than thoughts, more grounded in my body. My body causes me less anxiety because it is more obviously "real" than my thoughts.

RATIONALITY

If something provokes less anxiety, it means it is more real to you?

COMIC

(Across the stage on a small bike)
Your ontology is showing!

NARRATOR

It is projection: I get pissed at people for taking their lives nonchalantly, for *just* doing things, for not really committing. For willing to be lead about. *My* will separates me from the world. To not assert it, to just be passive? My mind says: "DANGER!"

RATIONALITY

You want them to let go. You want them to be passive. But this is *your* problem.

BUDDHA

Are you really separate Tidal?

NARRATOR

Oneness, Buddha? Yes, I believe it's in the meditative or artful contemplation of oneness, embedded as we are in the sensation of separateness--*that* delivers love. In drama, I love people becoming, when I see them see themselves. I feel apart of them and not hidden like a therapist.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

I don't hide. I observe.

NARRATOR

Observation needs perception.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

My perception, my self, my stuff, does not come
into my sessions.

NARRATOR

Yes. You're disconnected all right. Don't worry,
we feel it.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

It helps!

NARRATOR

It hurts.

(Blackout.)

LEARNING

(Parlour. Enter MARGE in a spotlight.)

MARGE

Sometimes, after I get beaten up in class, I think: I am retired. I don't need this. But then I think: This is good! This push makes me do the best I can. Without it, we'd be acting in some fluffy play. No emotions, no connections, no life, just walking around asking if someone wants tea. That isn't drama. That's just more of my regular life.

(Pause)

And its *how* we learn: we use *everything* we've got. Our minds, our emotions, our bodies. Especially our bodies! And we're given some of the hardest, contemporary plays; I feel proud to be in this class. We're not like other seniors, and they know it.

(Enter TIDAL and DESIREE. MARGE turns to DESIREE. They stand 4 metres apart, staring at each other. They get closer.)

TIDAL

What are you feeling?

MARGE

My stomach just tightened.

DESIREE

So did mine!

TIDAL

Continue monitoring your body in relation to your partner. What is it doing?

(Pause)

Start taking another few steps until you feel something else...

(MARGE and DESIREE walk slowly towards each other until they about 1m apart.)

MARGE

I just felt my head pull back.

DESIREE

My neck got tense.

TIDAL

Good! What are you feeling in relation to your body?

MARGE

I don't want to get closer.

TIDAL

What do you want to say to your partner?

MARGE

(Laughing)

Stay right there!

DESIREE

(Laughing, she runs at and past
MARGE.)

I'm coming for you!

(DESIREE Exits)

TIDAL

Drama comes close to being the ultimate integrative therapy: it doesn't focus on one level like most therapies; it synthesizes thinking, desires, behaviours, emotions, and the body. But, its not recognized for what it is or could be--a multi-level self-awareness technique. Being so therapeutic, you'd think its proponents would be more cautious... But then again, its *just* drama. Could we expect self-actualization from a drama class?

CARL ROGERS

Self-actualization is man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities... to express and activate all the capacities of the organism.

(SCREEN: (Rogers, 1995, p. 35))

MARGE

In this drama class, I am an explorer, and that makes me young again. I used to explore, but then I got scared. After my kids and all those years of working... I put Ms. Explorer, Ms. Potential, in a trunk. But now, she's loose! Ms. Potential is life. But not every class is going to give me that. It's you. You let us explore. To find our potentials.

TIDAL

I am therapist you know.

MARGE

Whatever you want to call it, you let me happen. On one hand, I want to explore, and on the other, I have to let go to really do that. Drama lets my adventure out, but still gives me control.

FRITZ

(Directly from video)

"In the safe emergency of the therapeutic situation, the patient begins to take risks--"

(SCREEN: *(Gestalt therapy demonstration by Fritz Perls 1 of 2, 2011)*)

TIDAL

Safety. Without it? No learning. Rather than being stuck, it's this belief in control that allows individuals to reach out, improvise, and develop new behaviours.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

New behaviours can be dangerous.

TIDAL

And so I have my clients and my actors learn to develop their "impartial observer".

FRITZ PERLS

Awareness.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Awareness: to split their consciousness into a doer and a dispassionate evaluator who stands on the side watching one's behaviours and thoughts.

(Enter RATIONALITY.)

TIDAL

It's possible to have a *passionate* observer-- someone who cares. The behaving self and awareness separate.

(To RATIONALITY)

When the suspension of belief becomes so strong, when one enters that psychotic state of splitting, the actor truly lets go--*it moves, it talks, it acts*--all the while their observer takes care of those in the scene.

CARL ROGERS

A caring force at one's core... Love?

FREUD

Sentimental. I call it the superego.

RATIONALITY

What about a "limiter"? Although, some of your actors admit that they loose themselves completely... What happened to their limiter?

TIDAL

The self is not awareness. Anyhow, if actors push too far, if the scene gets obviously too dangerous, I call them on that. The only limit is safety...

RATIONALITY

And safety is designated by whom?

TIDAL

The class, me, themselves...

RATIONALITY

People have different views of what's safe. Without knowing everything, drama is dangerous.

TIDAL

Life is dangerous! Like therapy, drama is a controlled danger. Teaching "limiters" is teaching awareness: this allows people to push into desire but not so far that they lose contact with the light of awareness.

RATIONALITY

How far will you push?

TIDAL

To the boundary line between safety and danger,
that's where learning thrives.

RATIONALITY

Say I don't want to live my life dangerously?

TIDAL

Your choice.

RATIONALITY

It sounds too intense to live by.

TIDAL

Drama is not life: these are dramatic scenes and therapy sessions. These are parts of life, explosions of creative exploration in heightened realities. People must differentiate between fantasy and reality to lead a sociable life. It's tempting to blur the two, to bring fantasy into regular life, by becoming instinctual without any awareness. It's so freeing but it can really damage relationships. Development of the third party observer is crucial so people can *observe* their reactions to the outside world, instead of just reacting.

RATIONALITY

What happens if my drama partner is not so nice? Sounds like you never know with whom you are going to partner with.

SAMANTHA

Like when we were an open class! That was terrible! People would show up, verbally attack us, and then we'd never see them again.

NARRATOR

I teach in and out: what's *me*, and what's coming from you? If someone feels personally attacked, I hold them responsible to bring that feeling forward. We have to feel and reveal our pain to understand its origin; we must become sensitive and thoughtful to understand weak spots. Some people hide behind drama to personally attack

others. Some people are just too sensitive: they feel personally attacked even when there is no personal intention behind an attack. Whatever the case, if it's not safe enough, I step in. In the perfect scenario, an actor could attack your weak spots, intentionally or not, and you'd feel this attack enough to consider reactions, but you wouldn't feel personally attacked.

INTIMACY

(Parlour.

SCREEN: ("Almost all of our sorrows spring out of our relations with other people." - Arthur Schopenhauer)

TIDAL, SAMATHA, MARGE, DESIREE, and LINDA are in an acting session. They sit in a circle.)

TIDAL

This is like the family I never had. I've been kind of an outsider most of my life.

SAMANTHA

I've always been the outsider, but here we're *all* outsiders. Why don't you be daddy--and I'll be your little girl.

MARGE

The rebel family? Ok, I'll be mom.

(To DESIREE)

Who're you?

SAMANTHA

My big sis'!

LINDA

And me?

DESIREE

(Laughing)

Her brother!! You know, I don't have a lot of friends. I come here to meet people.

SAMANTHA

Me too. Not a lot of friends. Not a lot of boys either! And we're all divorced too. I guess there's a lot of female competition here for the only male--Mr. Leader.

MARGE

Oh yes!

(Hugging NARRATOR.)

We love him!

DESIREE

Me too! Oh, I feel so young here too! Like a kid again...

RATIONALITY

Regression.

NARRATOR

Feeling young's not a bad thing.

SAMANTHA

You shouldn't act like *that*. You're "regressing"! How condescending.

MARGE

(To RATIONALITY)

My daughter puts that on me too. Don't you start.

DESIREE

The other seniors here though, they are *really* seniors.

SAMANTHA

Hell ya! Who wants to go out on a Friday and knit? I'll knit when I am 90!

LINDA

There are a lot of seniors who don't want to do anything, but they're the same ones who like to bitch about being lonely.

MARGE

I think most people are scared by what we do here, but drama makes perfect sense. You come, you play, you socialize, you leave. Though, I have to admit, this class is special: it's intense and we attract a certain type. We're a bit out there...

SAMANTHA

Ya! Remember that day we played Blind Circle and you grabbed my boob!

LINDA

I remember. We're the type that let's out our dirty laundry for the world to see.

TIDAL

Correction: for a *known audience* to see--not the world. A known audience is critical--it creates communion and deepens emotional learning. When you're here, you're engaged, alive, confident, and you want to contribute after showing your emotions. Remember when we had unknown audience? When we were an open class? There was no safety.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

A therapist is an audience.

IN THE TINY THERAPY
OFFICE, COUNSELLOR AND
CLIENT SIT OPPOSITE EACH
OTHER

COUNSELLOR

And how did that make you feel?

CLIENT

I felt like... Devastated? Knowing that they would never love me anymore. I mean, I know now... That they never loved me. It hurts. It hurts so much.
(Crying)

COUNSELLOR

(Clapping)

Brilliant! That was really good. Can I see that again? You were so good!

FADE OUT THERAPY OFFICE.

TIDAL

A therapist is not an audience: a therapist is one, usually dispassionate, person who observes--not an audience who claps. Second, therapists have to buy into the scene: they cannot "see" or break the illusion, for they must sustain their role for their show to be a success.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

We have to be professionals.

TIDAL

Fake... professional. I'm losing the difference.

RATIONALITY

Does it always boil down to: "Is this real?"

TIDAL

It's hard to be here like everyone else when this
thought continuously bombards me.

MARGE

Follow your own advice: "Just let go."

CARING

(Parlour. NARRATOR and MARGE sit opposite each other. Christmas decorations.)

NARRATOR

My senior actors teach me "old". They remind me that I'm young. Forty years in the future: same mind, new body. This doesn't move. What's *this*? I want sex, but nobody wants me. I'm still alive! *That's* why I push: I want to see vitality. Time is ticking...

MARGE

Sometimes you push too hard. I would come home after class, feeling beaten up, and cry. It was all new to me. Performing was really hard because I was so nervous. I'd come home and say: "Oh, I hate him." But then I'd go back the next week! I would never quit.

NARRATOR

Like me, they're looking for *vitality*. Drama's addictive: it's a drug, and I am their pusher. The "beating up" releases this juicy energy of freedom and emotions. It's being really alive. As we get older we tighten up and spiral down in our mental, emotional, and physical worlds. The lights dim... Dimming... Dimming...

(Enter DREARA)

DREARA

My name is Dreara. Retired. I'm getting older. I'm tired. Drugs? My busy children not here. I don't want to go out. I just watch now. Tick. Tick. Today, I will vacuum, dust, buy some groceries. Tick. Tick. I may or may not buy a lottery ticket. Tick. Tick. I talk with people, but I prefer to have less contact. I could tell them what I really think of what they said about my fantasy trip to India--I could. I push it down. Everything down. Down. This is old age? Disconnected. Alone? Did my phone just ring? Oh, I have to get my laundry. Tick. Tock.

(DREARA transforms into EXCITA)

EXCITA

When I come to drama though, I become alive. I am pushed into contact with my very being and into contact with people and situations far out of my comfort zone. And we relate. Oh, do we relate! So?! I wanted to go down the Ganges? Fuck you too! Drama's a workout: it leaves me breathless. Even if I cry my eyes out it doesn't matter. All of my problems just vanish and my possibilities stretch out before me. I get hungry there, stirred by desire. I could take on the world!

MARGE

But we settle for the coffee shop around the corner, and we talk up the good-looking men we find. We're youthful again. Energized. Sexualized...

NARRATOR

While therapy excites the mind, drama connects the entire body/think with its surroundings: integrating experiences without leaving any part behind. It's a body/think workout that allows people to let go of what they should be, and to express new or rarely used behaviours. It's intense.

COLLEEN

But, I don't want to have all this conflict and intensity. I just wanna have fun.

NARRATOR

This is not a clown class: it's not always "fun". If you don't want conflict, you're in the wrong place.

(SOUND: Seniors singing a Frank Sinatra song out of tune, and very slowly.)

Oh God, our nemesis--the senior singers. I call them the "The Death Sirens".

WARBLERS

(Sing-songy, sort of together.)

We warble. Warbling. Aren't you tired of fighting? Just sit with us in our softness. Come warble with us. Reminisce. Nothing too much, nothing stirring.

Just peaceful murmuring. Numbness is pleasant.
It's easier. Stickier. Gooier. Murmuring.
Murmuring. Murmuring.

NARRATOR

Seniors here have few options: Death by Sinatra or Knitting to Soothe 101. And then there's us! An intense drama class that engenders life, relations, and conflict. I want to stand here, but you want to stand here? Let's fight, negotiate, share--until our bodies battle for space. My drama is a fight against Death's dissolving face. Others want life to end as numbed as possible, distracted by these sonic tendrils that lure to a pre-death. But my conflict generates the emotional heat necessary to escape this rational numbness. Like life, I induce conflict; unlike life, I do it with the optimum safety that allows excitement to bloom. Drama needs gardeners comfortable with dangerous plants.

RATIONALITY

Some gardeners can't handle your emotionally charged shrubbery: they might have a trauma that keeps them away from seeking conflict.

NARRATOR

If the trauma's so big they can't handle drama, they need to be in therapy. Drama's inherent conflict will remain, its *danger* is the important reactive element that heals and vitalizes. No tightrope, no learning--but its not for everyone. Imagine a therapy client asking for no conflict in session? No confrontation equals stagnation. Some people need to be lit on fire, some people need stoking, and some need their fire screen removed. This creativity, this power, this essence--its a cauldron of desire at our core. It's chaos--and it's life. "Existence is inexorably free and, thus, uncertain".

SCREEN: (Yalom, 1980, p. 26).

RATIONALITY

And what am I?

NARRATOR

Rationality? Just one technique to hide desire--
along with other masks, costumes, makeup, and
props. Once one's power is glimpsed though, it's
addictive: it's the very life force that propels
our integrated body/think.

LINDA

There is life here.

MARGE

This is life.

DESIREE

It's God.

SAMANTHA

It's me.

RATIONALITY

But it's just desire...

NARRATOR

You say "just" a lot. It's like when you have my
actors describe events in the dulllest way
possible. JUST. You always try to snuff out their
fire, to deaden their connection to their
body/think.

TIDAL

Marge: what are you doing in this scene?

MARGE

I'm just sitting... drinking tea. Oh God. You hate
that word don't you? *Just*. Ok: I am drinking tea
because I can't pay my rent and I am worried about
the landlord coming to get it...

TIDAL

Make it worse...

MARGE

And, I know the landlord will demand sex from
me...

TIDAL

Worse...

MARGE

And he's really fat and ugly... And if I don't pay I will be thrown out... And if I get thrown out, I'll be penniless and have to sleep with even worse people to get money. And maybe I'll get an STD! No, I *will* get an STD!

NARRATOR

Sometimes, I get actors who are very unhealthy, to the point of death.

(A gurney with a sheet rolls out.
TIDAL pulls the sheet to reveal
JOHN.)

John. Boy, he loved drama. He had advanced cancer. One year to live. So I gave him a tough monologue about a lonely old guy who lives alone, paints, and talks to his paintings. It was really sad.

(JOHN sits up.)

Just read it John. Don't put any emotions on it.

(As NARRATOR)

He started to read and it was so intense--and he began to cry...

TIDAL

Oh God, John! You're gonna kill us...

JOHN

It's so intense. This is my life. This is *me*. I don't know if I can make it through this...

NARRATOR

I wanted to give him one more zap before he... something to hold on to and say...

JOHN

Now, *that* was living.

(Lying down.)

NARRATOR

God must be a dramatist, for in drama, like life, we come begging to the edge of life and death. Drama explodes in us: we become creative, expanded, energized. The soul doesn't relate to Science--only Art: to despair and laughter, love and hate, war and peace. It's the excitement of life. Always relational, drama is where the therapeutic encounter, the experience of one's

full being, resides. Wherever the dramatic, life is most fully engaged.

RATIONALITY

Clients and therapists have relationships...

NARRATOR

No: therapy is separation. A grey room with a "professional" who purposefully remains disconnected to maintain objectivity and distance? And your badly made sets! Here come the clients and actors, loaded with life and emotions, into your grey rooms lit by your dull phosphorescents, festooned with old framed prints of sunny farm houses flirting on the walls. It's a self-parody with nobody laughing.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

It is *not* the set, as you call it, which causes emotion. It's the work we do.

NARRATOR

No. Your sets are stages pre-painted with suffering. Any actor knows your tragic scene: in our society, when you're sad, you sit with a stranger who *will not* really care. Yet therapists marvel when clients cry: I must be doing something special! It's just stale scenes with actors bored of their lines. That's sad. But touch, real human touch...

(TIDAL touches RATIONALITY who convulses and shirks away.)

... whether physical or mental, is connection. Scary, no? You're scared to even hug a client. How can we help if even our bodies our denied their basic humaneness? Touch, our body/think-connectivity that leads to shared emotional insights, the purview of our basic humanity...

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Don't get involved--they are just clients.

TIDAL

Just?

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Just.

NARRATOR

You don't want to let go.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

It's called "professional distance".

NARRATOR

I call it scared shitless. No passion and no connection? *That* is when depression, pathology, and anger surface. But drama expresses this energy--it's an artistic sublimation of the energy rising up from the ever-desiring body/think.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Good therapy should look like paint drying. No need for all this talk of fire and life-force.

NARRATOR

What? A disconnected mind-fuck? Is that what you are after you heartless bitch! You advocate death, not life.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

No, what we do is disconnect the client from their pain. Together we can analyze it, draw it out, and then make them more productive.

NARRATOR

Productivity. Back to work. "You're better now." Produce. Produce. I thought therapy was meant to make people happier? To help--

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

To help them fit into society. When we say that we "help them," that means we help them understand how to be more adaptive. To society. Society demands production.

NARRATOR

And art is contrary to production. You're a business.

(SCREEN: [Commercial psychology, commercial because it is funded,] "requires at least some degree of humanistic and artistic acclaim, giving some perceived authenticity:" [psychologists] "actively seek to frame their services as artistic and authentic by perceptually decoupling them from

the commercial aspects of the business" (Voronov & De Clercq, 2007). Originally a quote on winemaking, but it feels just right here.)

CARL ROGERS

Yes, one that cares. Unconditional positive regard.

TIDAL

No cash? NO regard.

FREUD

Was he looking for his parents? The ones who abandoned him?

FRITZ PERLS

Ja, I think so. He thought we cared.

FREUD

I care--as long as his Visa keeps working!

(FRITZ PERLS, FREUD, and CARL ROGERS laugh.)

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Caring must be limited: boundaries are essential.

TIDAL

To keep the system and your self intact. To care one must connect, not observe. Because it makes you too anxious. Because you really want something else for your self. When you stop your connectivity, you stop that creative excitement. That's "professionalism"! Oh God, where am I?

SHAKESPEARE

An actor's worse fate: on a stage with actors who don't really care.

ADAPTATION

(On a purple planet.
CAPTAIN KIRK stands on a
rock. NARRATOR is
scanning the environment
with a tri-corder. COMIC
is dancing with an armful
of tribbles.)

CAPTAIN KIRK

It's instinctive, but the instinct can be fought.
We're human beings with the blood of a million
savage years on our hands. But we can stop it! We
can admit that we are killers but we are not going
to kill--*today*. That's all it takes. Knowing that
we're not going to kill--*today*!

(SCREEN: (Pevney, 1967))

NARRATOR

In the "real" world, we need to adapt to
environmental cues and rules to succeed. Kill
someone in the real world...

(Handing gun to COMIC and making
him point it at KIRK. KIRK puts
hands up.)

...you go to jail: you broke the rule.

(SOUND: Gunshot. Comic throws gun.)

Do not kill. Kill someone in the *theatre*
thought...

(Picking up a sword and sticking it
between COMIC's arm and chest)

No jail. In fact, you get to keep doing it
nightly.

COMIC

Great.

NARRATOR

And the audience shares the illusion. To be
successful in the imaginary world, to act well, we
have to uncover the rules just like in the real
world. Here, we don't avoid trip-wires--we have to
trip them. We need flexibility and fluidity too.
We have to know the consequences of behaviour, to

see what sets off these traps so we can design a better illusion.

COMIC

So, in real life, you wouldn't have stabbed me?

NARRATOR

Exactly! Here, I *have* to. Over-and-over, worse and worse, ever time. Sorry.

(Enter RATIONALITY dressed as SPOCK.)

SPOCK

I do not concern myself with the emotions. They are illusions. Mind is everything.

(Enter MCCOY with a Klingon battle staff.)

MCCOY

Spoken like a true soulless, Western scientist you green-blooded devil!

(SPOCK grabs a staff off the wall.

MUSIC: Fight music from Star Trek.)

Dirty Vulcan. Thinking thinking thinking. The more you do it, the better you'll be? You're going to fix your problems using that big green brain of yours? That's all you are--a brain!

COMIC

Umm... Someone...

SPOCK

I continue to learn natural and social rules to adapt faster; indeed, over time, my behaviour will become more patterned. I know that bothers you emotional humans, Dr. McCoy.

MCCOY

Even behaviours that don't fit with your basic sense of morality?! You rationalize any behaviour as "socially acceptable" that maximizes benefits.

(SPOCK gets MCCOY on the ground-- his staff at his throat.)

You're an accountant! A Nazi!

KIRK

It's worse McCoy. He's a cognitive behavioural therapist!

(KIRK stuns SPOCK.)

Who wants patterned response of optimized behaviour? We're human! Once we know *exactly* what to do, why go on living? Where is the voyage? The human adventure?

NARRATOR

Spock. Your logic is flawed. Full adaptation, which includes an awareness of your body and its emotions, is not possible without full awareness. In drama, emotions, intuitions, and bodies, are made obvious, tapped to discover their relation to the self.

SPOCK

Cognitions focus us on goals. Stability. Emotions are wild cards--they make us do things--out of pattern.

KIRK

Sometimes, a feeling, Mr. Spock, is all we have.

(SCREEN: (Pevney, 1967))

COMIC

Please...

NARRATOR

(Pulling the sword out of COMIC)

It's always this way or that with you guys. How about both? My type of drama, informed by my therapy training, increases awareness, by accessing these faster intuitive responses, and then combining these with cognitions to produce more adaptive behaviour.

KIRK

Increasing adaptability in the real world! Of course!

SPOCK

Please explain those crazy actors then. They're all over the place.

NARRATOR

Drama training focuses on, and applauds, emotions. To create and learn from these emotions, actors must break rules and *maladapt* to increase understanding. This might make them emotionally sensitized, but there's no training on the use of cognitions to temper these emotions or to create more adaptive social behaviours. So drama, especially if there is no cognitive component to the training, can be dangerous: it decreases social fit. Actors are plunged into deep emotional waters without any psychological support. Running on id, they become out-of-sync with society.

MCCOY

Heath Ledger.

SPOCK

Marlon Brando.

KIRK

Me!

ALL

Charlie Sheen!

SPOCK

Actors must veer contrary to adaptive thinkers. Releasing the id makes it necessary to monitor actions more off-stage. Context is key. Off-stage? Thoughts preferred. On-stage? Instincts. Fascinating.

NARRATOR

It's a harder, but richer, socialization process. My drama work is augmented contextual adaptation. The instinctual artistic paradise that some seek from drama is just a fantasy not found in reality-unless you're nuts, or an artist.

COMIC

Dying!!!

(ALL scramble to COMIC. Darkness.)

POLARITY

(Parlour. TIDAL walks around seated SENIORS. Their eyes are closed. RATIONALITY sits on the side pretending he is part of the group.)

TIDAL

Now, feel the weight of the orange. How much does your orange weigh? Now, sense its colour. See it vividly. Now, slowly peel your orange: very, very, slowly. Smell that orange as you peel. It's juicy. What do you smell? Really smell it... inhale its scent...

NARRATOR

God, this is boring! But its standard: every actor peels a make believe orange. I want to keep it exciting or they might leave. As I therapist, I feel the same: if therapy isn't exciting, why go? Is therapy just a Theatre of the Self, with clients being their own audience, playing their part, sans intermission, and leaving even more self-focused?

(SAMANTHA is precise; LINDA is erotic; MARGE and ELIZABETH are motionless.)

TIDAL

Everyone, open your eyes. How did that feel?

LINDA

It made me hungry!

SAMANTHA

I didn't want to close my eyes. It was too hard.

RATIONALITY

What about the other two? You didn't ask them.

NARRATOR

We're they doing anything? See, the dramatic *doing* excites: it draws our attention and focus. Notice cheetahs chasing gazelles, both hearts beating

furiously, dramatically. They draw us in. Not the motionless savannah tree in the background.

(Soundless snippet of FRITZ PERLS therapy session with Gloria. (*Gestalt therapy demonstration by Fritz Perls 1 of 2*, 2011))

Gestalt therapy's dramatic Fritz Perls: his joking eyes and wry smile lighting up that old black-and-white video. Gloria's having fun too. Fritz is pinning her down. Contacting her. They're both good actors.

COMIC

Didn't Gloria kill herself?

(Video stops.

SOUND: Record skipping with Fritz Perls' voice on "In the safe emergency of the therapeutic situation, the patient begins to take risks..." (*Gestalt therapy demonstration by Fritz Perls 1 of 2*, 2011))

NARRATOR

Should life be *that* dramatic?

(MONITOR: DRAMA TEACHER appears)

My old acting coach!

DRAMA TEACHER

Life is war! Life or death? Actors are warriors! Civilians don't get it. The corporate mind-fucking suits. Come to my class, learn, train, and become a warrior! But you won't get it. There's no warriors here. Show me warriors! I have a suitcase packed for New York. Always packed. I want guts! Given me fucking guts!!

NARRATOR

Drama is about war, but life is war *and* peace. Could we have joy and peace without our misery and war?

COMIC

A 2-hour play on *silence*? Let me be the first to pay!

NARRATOR

Who will pay? Transaction. Society sells us action, aggression, desire. Get "something"--the sale, the right outfit, the right home, the right vacation...

VOICE-OVER ON SPEAKER

And for everything else there's MasterCard.

NARRATOR

Culturally fed on a dramatic social diet of chasing desires leading to conflicts. Yet, before we can lust for product, the media must woo us with desire first.

(SCREEN: Department store; SOUND:
Chanting: "Keep buying. Keep going.
Don't stop.")

Shopping malls: the pinnacle of our society--this is what we're all the *doing* is for! Jammed shoppers in a torrent. Video walls, colours, lush, sickening scents, dance music thumps, each store pumping its brand, endless sales, agents, products, noise. The commercialization of our human spirit clamours. I want quiet: to meditate--not fight; I want the boring *being*, not the dramatic *doing*. I want to stop...

(MONITOR: SOCIETY appears. All music stops suddenly with a scratch.)

SOCIETY

You want what??

TIDAL

I just want to stop... sometimes.

SOCIETY

Did you see a sale?

(SPEAKER: FRITZ PERLS: "Scheiße
oder steigen Sie den Topf!")

(SCREEN: (Anderson, 2004, p. 106))

NARRATOR

Hurry up and shit? Even therapists conspire: *do* something! Where is the balance of doing and being? Buddha and Aristotle: they knew the Golden Mean. Life warps around these two poles pulling in opposite directions: light/dark, sad/happy, busy/quiet. Neither is right. In drama and therapy, we rarely show both sides, seldom synthesize the *doing* and *being* of self-actualization. We have two choices at any moment: we can sit at home, drink tea, watch TV, clean the cat litter, rinse/repeat; or we can assume personal responsibility in our existential freedom and fight for our desires. In my work, whether in drama or therapy, I don't offer the transience of happiness--which is only the by-product of feeling alive and creative. I offer the whole richness of existence, forever changing, between division and oneness, separateness and awareness. And it's not on sale!

(Blackout.)

DESIRE

(A 1950s diner. RATIONALITY is cleaning.)

(Enter NARRATOR)

NARRATOR

Like therapy, drama needs good partnering. A good partner expends energy, has an objective, and allows change. Emotions-based drama work depends upon conflict: *both* partners have to invoke a conflict--the worse, the better. In both my streams, therapy and drama, I push people to stimulate their selves by getting them to feed off the energy of conflict.

RATIONALITY

Drama and therapy as entertainment?

NARRATOR

Drama may be more honest and direct, but yes, both stimulate the mind. If you've seen the movie, why watch it again if you aren't going to be stimulated? Clients visit therapists to get a new movie based on their self. Existence, in our commercially driven, disconnected world, can be largely pathological stimulus addiction that never fulfills desire. But desire isn't bad--it's just form, like a tree or a thought. It's the addiction that's problematic. Are therapists helping or hurting by using therapy as a diversionary tactic to keep the self addicted to desire? Do psychological institutions, whose supporters are equally as desirous of desire, push this addiction? If selves are glimpsed, desire loses strength, and consumption rates go down. Unless we develop our third party awareness, something that stands outside of the lustful self, by highlighting the self, we inadvertently stoke the fuel in the furnace of new pathologies. That's where drama is more beneficial over therapy--it calls into question the whole enchilada. *What is reality?* Is me, *me*? Plus, most people don't necessarily have a chance to meet each other in such hyper-charged and intimate situations--they are usually *just* together. There is no other

creative process, neither art nor dance, which allows this. Only in drama do you get to replicate real life in performance, and its intimacy creates communitas, wellness, and happiness. Now, *that's* therapy.

(Lights up on another part of the diner. MARGE serves COLEEN and ELIZABETH)

MARGE

Whadda ya want?

NARRATOR

I put Coleen and Elizabeth together on purpose. Elizabeth and Coleen do not get along in real life. Elizabeth is reserved and Coleen is the rebel. They would not normally come into contact, but here, in drama, they must.

ELIZABETH

(Restrained.)

I will have...

COLEEN

I wanna a sundae! I wanna a sundae!

MARGE

And you ma'am?

ELIZABETH

Ummm... Hmmm...

COLEEN

Sundae! SUNDAE!

ELIZABETH

Can you believe this?

MARGE

Can you just order please?

TIDAL

(Breaking the scene.)

How was that?

ELIZABETH

Very confusing. I didn't know *who* to concentrate on.

NARRATOR

Ignoring the obvious in front of her, Elizabeth just stopped reacting. When presented with an anxiety-producing situation, my therapy clients do the same. The process of getting an actor or a client to react is the same: help them reveal their desires. To allow spontaneity, when the shifting intuitions of the body/think to take hold, we need to make conscious the actor's inner and in-the-moment desires. Once we have a desire, a cognitive, dramatic objective can unfold.

RATIONALITY

How does this help therapy clients?

NARRATOR

Touching a desire allows one to know what they want. *How* this is fulfilled becomes secondary. Desire structures life, and scenes. It brings vitality and understanding. (As *TIDAL*) Okay, just Elizabeth and Marge now. Elizabeth, your objective is to "refine Marge". Marge, your objective is to "stab Elizabeth".

MARGE

Hey, lady! I want some service here.

ELIZABETH

Yes, Madame. How may I serve you?

MARGE

I want toast. Now!

ELIZABETH

Would you like whole wheat, rye, multigrain...

MARGE

White!

ELIZABETH

I thought you might.

MARGE

What??

ELIZABETH

Nothing. I'll be right back.

(Exits.)

FEEDBACK

(COUNSELLOR and CLIENT sit in a cramped office. NARRATOR stands outside of them observing with RATIONALITY.)

NARRATOR

In therapy, feedback is critical for growth; without it, clients stagnate in their own neuroses, blind to how others see them.

COUNSELLOR

Whenever you talk about your husband, I get the feeling you are really angry. I get scared of saying anything to you. I wonder if this is the same for your husband?

CLIENT

That's nonsense! He doesn't have anything to say! I have asked him a many times to say something! "Express yourself!"

COUNSELLOR

Ok, I want to stop you there. What was I just saying to you?

CLIENT

Not much. Carl mentioned something like that before but it's bull!

COUNSELLOR

Ok, I am going to stop you again. Can you tell me exactly what I said?

CLIENT

Well... you said that you were scared of me and maybe Carl is too. But that's the thing...

COUNSELLOR

That's good. So how does that make you feel when you know you are scaring people?

CLIENT

Not very good.

(Lights down on COUNSELLOR and CLIENT.

SCREEN: "One of the most important ways learning takes place in a group is through a combination of self-disclosure and feedback. This often leads to deeper levels of intimacy in the group" (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2008, 247).)

IN THE PARLOUR, AGAIN.
NARRATOR stands alone.

NARRATOR

In drama, actors must expose their real desires. They do so by distancing themselves from their fear of exposure through a transitional object called a role. Actors must become intimate with themselves, their being-in-its-world, and translate this into feelings. Eventually, they must not create distance: they must create the role from their self. Understanding one's desires and feelings, and then exposing this connection to a known audience, is essential in my class. If the class feels that someone is holding back or not connecting, we will confront the person to examine our intuitions. This sensitivity and assertiveness training teaches actors to become aware of dormant desires and put their insights into actions. It's Gestalt therapy on stage.

(Lights up on LINDA and DESIREE standing together.)

LINDA

Are you listening to me?

DESIREE

Yes, I am.

LINDA

You aren't answering my questions!

DESIREE

Well, what do you want me to say?

LINDA

FUCK!

TIDAL

(Breaking scene.)

And, scene... Interesting. How was that for you?

LINDA

I just hate her!

DESIREE

I could tell! When I started to yell at you, I saw you pulling away even more. I just wanted to punch you!

LINDA

Ya! I knew you did. I like playing this chick!

TIDAL

How was that for you as the audience?

MARGE

I liked it. You were really angry with her when she shot you down. I could feel it.

LINDA

Yes! I was! I'd never be like at home though.

NARRATOR

This is traditional drama's big issue: feedback gets stuck in the performance space. The actor regards feedback as performance-related--it's not personally related. Actors generate two classifications of being: *this* behaviour is "acting" and *this* behaviour is "not acting".

RATIONALITY

How can drama be therapeutic if a division between behaviours is occurring? Behavioural bleed must occur for adaptive responses to carry over into the real world--

NARRATOR

In *my* drama--maybe I should call it dramatic awareness training--I encourage this bleed by highlighting actors' awareness of on- and off-stage behaviours, and then questioning the divide. Actors can use fictional characters and scripts as transitional objects to transform their real life behaviour--it's the idea behind dramatherapy. After creative play with "the possible," with a

character, those behaviours can be transferred back to reality, but only if adaptive. I question them: "Are the behaviours you have learned adaptive?" This transition is doubly important: the actor sees that other behaviours are possible, they become more free, more confident, and by can adapt to new situations quicker.

RATIONALITY

All the world's a stage?

NARRATOR

All the stage's a world.

NARRATOR

Between drama and therapy, but unlike typical drama classes, where interpersonal dynamics are discarded as extraneous, I teach interpersonal feedback. Audience feedback gives actors an understanding of what others are feeling and wanting. Honest and sensitive feedback allows exchange, growth. People understand themselves from new angles in relation to others. It's another source of work, and it ultimately promotes safety.

TIDAL

You how did you feel Samantha?

SAMANTHA

When everyone was attacking me in that scene, I felt ganged up on. Everyone was yelling at me and I felt like I wasn't doing very well. I felt awful.

MARGE

I hate to say this, but--get over it. We are acting. You are improvising. If you are playing the victim, *play* the victim and deal with it. We are *actors*.

TIDAL

We are actors, but we are also human.

RATIONALITY

Why did you mention this?

NARRATOR

In my class, labelling what is "acting" or what's "professional" is a cop-out. Therapists, directors, actors, and clients all do it. They disconnect through labels to remain untouched. Professionalism or "just acting" becomes code for "I'm insensitive and don't care about you."

FREUD

Professionalism: the new defence? I better tell Anna.

NARRATOR

Let her know about "social norming" too.

MARGE

But in drama, I can yell because it's not real. If she feels emotional, great! I've done my job!

TIDAL

Partially. You forget that there was another person here who isn't as versed in drama, and she, unlike you, hasn't build up her impartial observer or her knowledge about how this class works.

FREUD

Third party observer? Sounds like another defence. Anna!

AWARENESS

(An extremely tiny
counsellor's office.
COUNSELLOR and CLIENT are
seated opposite to each other.
NARRATOR sits on their desk,
trying to not be in their
way.)

COUNSELLOR

Tell me about your mother.

CLIENT

No.

COUNSELLOR

(Holds up sign reading:
"Resistance")

CLIENT

(Holds up sign reading:
"Projection")

NARRATOR

Increasing awareness is a goal of most therapies,
drama therapy, and drama. There is always
resistance to awareness, and desires reveal this.
Masks, social rules, rationality... We become
lost, idea-less. Generally dumb and stupid. Like
therapy, drama is about removing these obstacles
to growth—

(SCREEN: (Yalom, 1980, p. 5))

Self-awareness is a knowing of the body/think's
emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual
states in relation to each other. Self-awareness
allows authenticity, the distance between these
dimensions and one's desires, to be measured.
Relational awareness, a guess of another's
dimensions and one's relation to one's
social/cultural reality, is empathy: it allows one
to anticipate engagement rules. Some therapies,
like Gestalt, somatic, and Reichian psychotherapy,
are closer to drama, in that they share an
emphasis on examining bodily states and non-
verbals to uncover our felt-sense awareness. In
drama, actors also learn to discover and connect

their emotional and bodily states. After awhile, the mind bores of awareness. It's contrary to the self's desire for excitement to substantiate itself through conflict and division. More awareness, less substantiation, and more terror for the self. We must therefore, in drama and therapy, go slowly.

ACT II

POWER

(S&M Club. SLAVE is tied to a cross. Enter MASTER.

MUSIC: Puro Teatro (*La Lupe - Puro Teatro*, 2009)

SCREEN: "To see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more: this is a hard saying but an ancient, mighty, human, all-too-human principle [....] Without cruelty there is no festival." – Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals/Ecce Homo*)

MASTER

(Cracking his whip.)

You think I am acting?

SLAVE

No sir!

RATIONALITY

Drama can be cruel.

(MASTER whipping SLAVE.)

NARRATOR

Actors need to delve deep into their emotions. Develop their conflict. Victimizers and victims... attack and defend...

SLAVE

Stop. Stop. STOP!

MASTER

Oh yes. Yes. That's what you want you little bitch.

RATIONALITY

Acting is S&M?

NARRATOR

By exploding their roles, they allow the scene to soar and the audience to believe. Witnessing life

within as pulsations of multitudinous colours
driven by desire.

SLAVE

Owwwww...

MASTER

YES!

NARRATOR

They might have been killed with a knife, but damn
it felt great! They might have killed, stabbing
someone to death repeatedly, but OH YA, it felt
great!

SLAVE

Owwwww...

MASTER

More dearest? MORE???

RATIONALITY

Are actors insane, and morally corrupt to revel in
this?

NARRATOR

Do we lust after pain: a soulful hunger?

(SCREEN: "The two best teachers are
love and pain." – Andrea Haskell
(F. P. Miller, Vandome, &
McBrewster, 2010).
Enter COLEEN, LINDA, ELIZABETH, and
MARGE.
MASTER and SLAVE go to black.)

RATIONALITY

There are a lot of power plays going on in your
drama work. Your actors give you a lot of power.
You take a lot of power. Do you ever give it away?

NARRATOR

I try.

(As TIDAL)

Since I am tired of having all the power here: I
am going to give you power. What do you want to
do?

COLEEN

I want to have more fun!

ELIZABETH

I'd like to run this class!

MARGE

I'll just do whatever you want me to!

LINDA

I liked the old way!

SAMANTHA

I'd like an explanation!

NARRATOR

See what happens when a power vacuum occurs? When power, will, and self occur, conflict cometh.

MARGE

I told my daughter that it doesn't matter how old you get... politics will always be there.

TIDAL

Why did you want to get rid of Desiree then?

(SCREEN: Refusing to deal directly with group outliers and address interpersonal conflicts, therapy groups look to therapists to deal with outliers.)

MARGE

It's just easier! I know you want us to stay with her, to work with her, but why does she have to be so hard to work with?

(SCREEN: The group's selfish need for control exerts itself by trying to eliminate outliers. Therapists too are selective with members before admitting them to a therapy group.)

TIDAL

If you never had conflict with people you'll never have good drama. Outliers are danger: But wish for them! In danger growth lies.

MARGE

What about Coleen? Do you wish for her?

TIDAL

Touché. Well... She is *too* disrespectful. *Too* dangerous. Toxic.

(SAMANTHA and MARGE, and COLEEN and LINDA sit face-to-face. TIDAL gives them pretend foods to eat: bananas, corn on the cob, and spaghetti. Unlike the others, Coleen shows a complete harvesting and then smothers the food over her breasts. The others stare.)

NARRATOR

Damn, freedom can be annoying. I could tell her how to eat spaghetti, but that's directing. I am supposed to be a facilitator: encourage people to be creative--but yet... I am so annoyed with her.

RATIONALITY

She's pushing your reality too much?

NARRATOR

The others seem to know instinctively what box I want them to play in. Not her.

RATIONALITY

Maybe the others are shitty actors? Maybe Coleen knows your mind's rules and breaks them--like requested--

NARRATOR

Drama is about purposefully breaking rules. Coleen does that but why she is so annoying? Everyone is always trying to come up with rules. I give the simplest instructions, like "Walk in a circle..."

(Group starts circling)

...and invariably, someone will say...

LINDA

In what direction?

NARRATOR

We've learned to mistrust. Whenever we feel an impulse, we stop. Look at babies though: they do

whatever they want. In drama, we learn to trust again. Trust makes spontaneity possible.

(COLEEN is walking in a straight line)

NARRATOR

And then we come to Coleen: always the rule breaker. Maybe she wants attention? Not to be creative, but to suck up space. Does she break rules to enlarge her sense of self?

RATIONALITY

You barely give directions though... You want them to be creative.

NARRATOR

Yes, but creative within a box.

RATIONALITY

Whose box?

NARRATOR

Yes, I want *some* control. Coleen's destructive because she doesn't follow directions. She's got a perceptual filter that somehow changes what she hears into what she wants to hear.

RATIONALITY

Similar to your perceptual filter?

NARRATOR

She had a stroke. Maybe it's affected her cognitions? Powerful combination: a stroke and a strong personality. She's got a personality convinced of the distortions it sees, and poof, strange and unexpected behaviours!

RATIONALITY

What's distortion and what's reality?

COMIC

Bring in the democratic vote!

NARRATOR

Democracy destroys the outlier: even in drama, freedom is risky. Coleen's freedom--becoming chaotic to avoid experiencing her anxiety with

conflict--it pushed her out of the group. To be chaotic is not drama. Drama is learning to synthesize chaos, ego, and conflict; and, although drama demands some chaos, ultimately the group's desire leans towards those patterns that provide the safest growth through stability. Groups will eject the *too* chaotic, and this leads them to be comprised of more patterned, more socially endurable, individuals.

RATIONALITY

What happens when outliers leave?

NARRATOR

Faced with the reality of removal, or an ill fit because they wanted something else, outliers attack me personally. Coleen called me a "control freak". Elizabeth called me "useless". Transferring their anger, trying to stop me from pushing my agenda, they attack. It's a question of power: how much to push? Assertive directors and therapists can push too fast, constricting the box too much, demanding rigidity. Passivity is a problem too: most clients/actors, scared of responsibility, push for direction, a transfer of knowledge/power. So, unlike most, I give them both: direction and freedom. I allow decisions but within a box. For example, even though producing a play wasn't my goal, and I could have said "no", I allowed it because it was still within the dramatic box, and I want their egos to surface. Power reveals desire, and empowerment is confidence in one's will.

SCREEN: "Therapy empowers us to act politically [....] to release psychic energies towards creative social change." (Bell & Klein, 1996, p. 99)
Blackout.
Spotlight centre-stage, into which LINDA steps.)

LINDA

When I first came, I was so shy. Being in drama here has really changed me. Now, I'm on the Board! I might have dementia but that's *your* problem. I hope you know my lines because I can't remember!

SAFETY

(An accident scene. Police and ambulance.

MUSIC: Vivaldi's "L'estro Armonico".

SCREEN: The words "Safety," "Control," and "Trust" go by slowly.

Enter TIDAL as a police officer. MARGE is under a car, injured.)

MARGE

Give me a sense of control over my environment and with that, I can improvise, I'm not stuck. I can be. And here, in this class, I am safe; anything thing I do here is fine. No judgments. It's theatre: I am allowed to be crazy. I feel safe, but...

(MARGE's head falls to the ground.
TIDAL runs to her.)

TIDAL

But?

MARGE

When I did that scene with Desiree. When I pretended to that dean at her university... The same school that made her leave. I didn't want to be that evil. I don't want to hurt others. Oh God.

(MARGE dies.)

TIDAL

No! What happened here?

(Enter DESIREE. Alone, she rolls out on a stretcher, wounded. TIDAL runs to her.)

TIDAL

What happened?

DESIREE

You didn't hurt me Marge. You helped. You brought me back to my memories. Oh, the police. I'm saved.

I was having an out-of-body experience. Marge was a dead. I was back in university. I was remembering being thrown out of school... by the dean... my pride... my parents...

NARRATOR

Who did this to you?

DESIREE

So much pain...

(DESIREE dies. SAMANTHA moans from a bush.)

TIDAL

Samantha? Is that you? Where are you?

SAMANTHA

(Falling out of the bush.)

I'm so mad at you! You made me reveal myself to all those people! I didn't want to, but you took me into my shit anyhow. No one else had to go there. I was new. That was unsafe. "It's just theatre?" you said... So icky...

TIDAL

It's a trick drama teachers use.

SAMANTHA

Distancing your humanity with a concept? "Theatre"...

TIDAL

Don't die... I am sorry.

(SAMANTHA dies.)

TIDAL

What is going on?!

(Enter LINDA, bandaged, hobbling.)

LINDA

You did! You did this, you phoney!

NARRATOR

But, I'm the police!

LINDA

You're the police all right: always in control,
always pushing! Driving up behind us in the night,
we thought you were some mad man. We drove faster.
You drove faster. Faster... Faster... WHAM!

(Complete blackness.
Spotlight on NARRATOR. Pause.
CLINICAL SUPERVISOR appears on
monitor.)

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Kicking up dust. You pushed your clients too far.

NARRATOR

They knew it wasn't real.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

It was very real. Why did you make them go through
all their traumas? You re-traumatized them.

NARRATOR

No. We worked through their memories together! It
was like a psychodrama and I was helping. They
brought me their memories. I didn't ask for
traumas! They could have brought in anything. I
figured they needed release. I hoped--

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Hope doesn't count: know.

NARRATOR

I am still learning. Every moment a new self...

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Seek supervision.

NARRATOR

It's a drama class.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

You're doing therapy.

NARRATOR

I--

(MARGE appears without wounds, well
dressed with a big smile.)

MARGE

Hey! Lay off! He helped me, lady. I admit it wasn't pleasant. I felt like shit for a week, but who knew how much emotions I had stored up here? What a relief to go into that moment. To really do what I wanted all these years. I was free. FREE! Do you know what you did? The most dangerous thing Tidal did was becoming a therapist and a researcher! I was so nervous when I found out: I used to watch what I said...

TIDAL

I don't understand. You're alive?

(Enter DESIREE, completely healed.)

DESIREE

We're all alive, Tidal! You can't get rid of us. By working with our memories, you helped. Thank you.

TIDAL

So, you didn't die: it just hurt for awhile.

DESIREE

Taking the knife out always hurts a little.

TIDAL

You didn't mind being driven off the road?

MARGE

NO! It was a thrill!

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

It wasn't safe.

DESIREE

We trust Tidal completely. Trust is our safety.

(Enter LINDA, still in bandages.)

LINDA

Well, I don't trust him. I don't even want him to take my photograph! And I'm wondering about this thesis too. He wants to make fun of old ladies you know.

TIDAL

I thought everyone was fine? You're still hurt.

LINDA

I like my wounds too much to give them up, thank you very much.

MARGE

She keeps playing her old scene: the one without trust. Trust me: the more trust, the better you'll get. The worst actors trust the least.

DESIREE

Trust depends on the individual. I'm scared to be spontaneous. I say things that hurt other people.

MARGE

This is *drama*! If you say something real, something deep and strong, the rest of us have to deal with it.

LINDA

Being real is dangerous.

TIDAL

That's why we welcome it.

DECONSTRUCTING

(On the high beams of a
skyscraper in construction.
MARGE enters, in a
construction worker's outfit.
TIDAL hangs from one of the
beams.)

MARGE

Drama is frosting. I've had so little frosting in
my life. My life's been all cake--a dry cake with
some chunks of chocolate: my kids. Years of
control. "Women your age act like *this*." We're
trained. The crust gets harder and thicker with
age. "Fuck" used to be my favourite word. It got
me in trouble. Then it wasn't just "fuck" I
stopped saying. But I come here and I can say
Fuck! Oh! What happens if I can't stop?

TIDAL

These words reside in you, telling you not to
speak them. What would it be like if you
controlled *them* Marge? Relishing them and your
freedom in your mouth? Swearing can be empowering,
a vocal signal to society that says: "I've got
power too."

NARRATOR

I teach my actors to let go of their superegos'
control over their actions. Empowering egos? You'd
think I am a therapist or something--

MARGE

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck! FUCK! FUCK FUCK FUCK! I am so
lucky to find this fucking frosting! I use to eat
so much frosting when I was young. Now, I want
frosting back: I want to feel young again. That's
drama! Getting rid of this stiff, old mask. I'm at
a point in my life that I don't want to be in a
mould with a mask on anymore. Sprinkles would be
nice. Fuck! Less masks, more freedom.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

We offer this in therapy.

(Enter DESIREE.)

DESIREE

Therapy? Hah! Drama is way more fun! If I really let go, I'd shake this whole building down! I'd be perfect: but then I wouldn't be here--I'd be God. It's not possible to be 100% me. If I let go a bit, maybe 90%, I'd reveal a bit of God.

MARGE

The closer to me I get, the better I feel. That's why we're pulling this building down--I want a better view.

(Enter SAMANTHA.)

SAMANTHA

In drama, I come into contact my experience. I become aware of what my capabilities are. They shouldn't call it acting: they should call it *being*.

NARRATOR

The more hooks into one's self, the less movement. The more rigid the self-concept, the more defences, and the less creative expression.

(Enter ELIZABETH and RATIONALITY slathered in protective gear. They are chained to the building.)

ELIZABETH

This is really high up. I'm surprised you guys can get up here.

DESIREE

How are you going to act with all that stuff on?

ELIZABETH

I think... I'll be fine. Anyhow, my movements are perfect, I'm strapped in. I'm not going anywhere.

(ELIZABETH walks across a beam perfectly and slowly like a robot.)

RATIONALITY

Step-by-step. Easy does it. Don't look down. How does a construction worker walk? Yes. That's it.

ELIZABETH

See. Perfection. Perfection.

MARGE

And how do you *feel*?

ELIZABETH

I think I'm doing a very good job!

RATIONALITY

A great job! Yes! It's wonderful!

DESIREE

Nice cage, no canary.

(ELIZABETH returns to relative
safety.)

MARGE

But, you knew you weren't going to fall.

ELIZABETH

Yes. There's nothing wrong with that. I survived.

RATIONALITY

You're just jealous that she can act perfectly
well without digging up emotions like you all have
to do.

MARGE

She was perfect: perfectly lifeless. Nothing at
stake. Nothing to feel. No matter how good it
looked, there is always something missing.

NARRATOR

All structure--no God.

RATIONALITY

That's what we like!

SELF

(On a windy cliff edge. Enter MARGE, SAMANTHA, LINDA, and DESIREE.

MONITOR: "Life should be lived on the edge of life. You have to exercise rebellion. To refuse to taper yourself to rules, to refuse own your success, to refuse to repeat yourself, to see yourself every day, every year, every idea as a true challenge and then you are going to live your life on a tightrope."-- Phillipe Petit (Marsh, 2008))

MARGE

I am too old. I'm going to crash this time. I can't do this anymore. I am going to let you down.

SAMANTHA

You're not quitting! You are going to jump! This isn't real. There's no edge! It's not life or death!

LINDA

For me it is. My age is catching up with me... my condition is worse: my brain and my body are not functioning the way I want. I am emotional about leaving everyone though. I have had more intimacy here than with my own family. I've really gotten to know you all very well. Sorry.

(Exits.)

MARGE

What? *She* leaves and you say nothing? Looks like I'll have to stay now.

(TIDAL crawls over the abyss's edge)

TIDAL

I've been waiting to catch you guys. What's up?

MARGE

Linda left.

TIDAL

Ah! Last week it was Candice. I made her yell for the first time in her life. Too fast maybe... Personal boundaries, the damn "self" again. It's what we are fighting against...

MARGE

We should tell them right from the start that we run a very emotionally challenging class. If they can't take it, they should not be here.

TIDAL

The best theatre, the most insightful therapy, is the most intimate... the most dangerous. When we get close to emotions, or someone, we get scared.

DESIREE

Some people *should* leave--like Elizabeth.

SAMANTHA

Elizabeth always hacks you down after class. She convinced Bernice to leave when she left, you know. Speaking of...

(Enter ELIZABETH who sits with
MARGE. TIDAL turns to them both.)

TIDAL

In this improv, Marge is a woman answering a personal ad. Your first date is at a cafe.

MARGE

Good evening, Paul.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me? My name is not Paul.

MARGE

Yes it is! That's who I was talking to on the phone.

ELIZABETH

It wasn't me.

MARGE

Yes it was. It says right here.

ELIZABETH

Uh... This is crazy.

(Looking at TIDAL)

I'm not a man.

NARRATOR

(To audience)

Elizabeth said "No" when improvs demands a "Yes". Instead of letting go of her gender identity, Elizabeth's identity defences come up. A beginning or a bad actor restricts their behavioural range to keep their self intact.

ELIZABETH

I heard you, Narrator! Trying to make me a man now! This isn't acting. All this emotional crap. All this "fun"! If anyone saw us, they'd think we're retarded. I've worked in theatre. *I* know. If you want to act, all you need to do is figure out what you are going to do and keep doing it! We need a goal. I am not here to make friends. I am here to work. To do something! Like a *real* play. Goodbye!

(Exits.)

(SCREEN: "6 Months Later.")

MARGE

When she left, you pushed more and we got better.

RATIONALITY

Elizabeth was right though. You are all about process. But what's your product? Drama should produce something in the end...

NARRATOR

Like some therapies, drama prioritizes first process to get to the scene's core--the actor; later we shift into product. Demanding productivity up front is yet another block to relieve anxiety over awareness and emotion, but most therapies push one-track thinking-styles to achieve product without accounting for temporal awareness shifts. Take CBT: there's a product-oriented way to think--*all the time*. "Does this get me closer to my goals or not?" Concentrating on being busy with disconnected strands and ideations, without thoroughly understanding one's

desire first, leads to neuroticism. Do you remember Julie?

(Enter JULIE. SAMANTHA and MARGE sit.)

TIDAL

(To SAMANTHA)

And where do you feel that in your body?

SAMANTHA

In my neck. It's really tight through here. Here.

TIDAL

Good. And thanks for becoming aware of your body first this time. You got rid of the past, the reasons, the "because" and the "whys"... And you just noticed. Great. How about you Julie?

JULIE

Me? Wow! I am so glad to be here. I'm retired now, you know, but you can never be too busy. I get up, I walk my dog, I go shopping. But acting is great. I used to do some drama in school, but I finished. There was so many rain puddles outside my place today, which made me think of acting. I was hoping to come here for a long time. I am always looking for things to do. Busy. Busy beaver! And my husband, who just shot himself, depressing, you know, anxious... Well, he thought I was an actress. So, he took that shotgun and blew his brains out. It's been six months. I feel better, and I am ready to jump into something much more exciting. I want to do something...

(Lights slowly fade on her babbling)

... because, you know, it's being retired, you have a lot of time, and I think you need to be doing stuff to keep yourself busy. So, I'm planning for the Spring Fair and maybe I'll wear a carnation or two...

NARRATOR

She disappeared. I wish I could have referred her, but I am just a drama teacher.

NAMING

(At the "Festival of Roses"--a convention centre filled with rose displays.

RATIONALITY sets up a booth with the banner that reads: "The Therapeutic Rose".

NARRATOR enters bedraggled with roses stuffed in his clothes.)

RATIONALITY

Emotional expression, learning to make social connections, learning about oneself, self-actualization, conflict evaluation and reaction, adaptive response, meta-awareness, integrative psychology... Sounds like therapy to me. But what is the name of your booth?

NARRATOR

Always that question! What do you call it? At first, it was "Acting Classes for Seniors".

RATIONALITY

I thought it was more than just acting?

NARRATOR

It is! So it became "Elders Unit! A Theatre Project".

RATIONALITY

Still sounds like just acting...

NARRATOR

Ya, so we've settled, for now, on "EmotionFlow: Emotional Expression Through Drama".

(Enter COMIC on a tiny bike covered in cheap flowers.)

COMIC

Catchy!

NARRATOR

How do you label the never labelled?

RATIONALITY

It has been labelled: "dramatherapy".

NARRATOR

No. Dramatherapy uses drama but focuses on therapy. Drama is an aspect of what we do--not the whole shebang. We are like a well-being class meant to holistically invigorate using drama. Call it "therapy"? I'd be alone. Call it drama though and people show--albeit with different views on drama...

RATIONALITY

It's a free world.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

That's the benefit of therapists: we adapt to a person's worldview.

NARRATOR

No: you adapt within a certain range in your worldview. What would you do if your client suggested dancing? You'd refer. And if they don't like *your* therapy, they're outta there.

(SPEAKER: "FIVE MINUTES TILL
JUDGING: ENSURE NAMES ARE SPELLED
CLEARLY.")

RATIONALITY

You're in a tight squeeze then. Won't call it drama. Won't call it therapy. The unnameable's a tough sell.

COMIC

And EmotionFlow? Sounds like feminine hygiene.

NARRATOR

They're women! They came up with that. Not a boy's title is it? But, it's all in flux. Developing. Refining. I'm easy--I let my own desires intermingle with theirs until the definition surfaces. Definition is desire.

RATIONALITY

It's always about you.

(Lights up on MARGE and LINDA
sitting together.)

LINDA

At least he knows what he's doing. Therapists know psychology. It would be very disappointing to find out he's like us. Therapists know better. They've worked out their issues.

NARRATOR

Therapists shouldn't have any issues? Therapists have nothing to get through? Unemotional rationality as perfection. Isn't she in for a reality check.

MARGE

You've got issues?

NARRATOR

Sore spots. But the public wants therapists without these. Drama-free. Just observers. Just helpers. The public wants me to be ideal. Like they want to be.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

(Admiring a rose)

As it should look.

NARRATOR

To seem free of humanity's eternal problems? Idolized teachers, blameless parent-figures? Needless? Inhuman? I'm not sketching that. And when your clients see what's underneath your professional veneer? Watch out. Disappointment. Anger. Who can lead us now? God? Strike. Emotionally screwed up therapists? Strike.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Veneer is power; without, results are impossible.

RATIONALITY

Isn't "facilitator" better? Giving birth to new ideas and new behaviours? Hmm, you're like a wet nurse.

NARRATOR

Great. I used to think "therapist" was a cool...

PARTY. ENTER PARTY GOER.
MUSIC IN THE BACKGROUND.

PARTY GOER

So, what do you do?

TIDAL

(Proudly.)

I'm a therapist.

PARTY GOER

Oh-oh! I've gotta go! No, seriously. Really? Oh...

TIDAL

Don't worry. I can only see your deepest most
fears and sexual desires.

(PARTY GOER moves away slowly.)

NARRATOR

I'm a therapist!! Say this and watch people run,
attack, or try to get free therapy. People imbue
therapists with power to create a scene and then
ping off this role. When I accept their label they
play all sorts of games...

(Turns to PARTY GOER 2)

TIDAL

Hey, how's it going?

PARTY GOER 2

What do you *mean*? I *know* those therapist looks.
Don't even try that therapy shit with me!

(Fade PARTY GOER 2.)

NARRATOR

One clinical psych professor told me that she just
stopped saying it. Now, she works "in the arts".
And try getting people into therapy? Even worse.
When I went to another seniors' centre, they hated
the term "therapy": it meant that other people
would know their business. "We're too old to worry
about therapy now. We just want to live."

RATIONALITY

How about calling yourself a director?

NARRATOR

It's too power loaded. Actors become passive-aggressive with that term. I need to see people's socially unfiltered aggressive and desirous impulses to surface.

RATIONALITY

So I'll call you a *facilitator*: it's a feminist reduction of you. It's apropos.

NARRATOR

Nope. *Facilitator* gives participants too much power. They don't take me seriously enough.

RATIONALITY

They like having power, and you like being used.

(SPEAKER: "TWO MINUTES TO JUDGING.
PLEASE LABEL YOURSELF CLEARLY.")

NARRATOR

No, most of the time, people just want to be led. Following is just easier, and the loneliness of freedom is too threatening.

RATIONALITY

Maybe they need someone to structure the class? If you don't, someone will.

NARRATOR

Someone did! There was a time when I hadn't named myself, or the class, and that vagueness created anxiety--and a desire for control. One person sensed the power vacuum and tried to take over the class. Eventually, she left and made her own class, over-controlled it, and it failed. People like some limits. A box to play in. But, if I am too easygoing, the work slows, anxieties bloom, power struggles ensue, and people run.

(SPEAKER: "TIDAL GRACE, PLEASE GET
YOUR BOOTH READY IN ONE MINUTE.")

RATIONALITY

They must feel better when *something* is happening.

NARRATOR

You feel better when things makes sense.

RATIONALITY

I like direction.

(SPEAKER: "TIDAL GRACE, THIRTY
SECONDS. WHAT IS YOUR NAME?")

NARRATOR

You are nothing without direction. I provide
direction, but I'm flexible. I'm a facilitator
with a director's stick.

RATIONALITY

Direction with the veneer of freedom.

NARRATOR

I'm a therapist, aren't I?

(Laughing.)

Balancing my power with others' is important.
Unlike a director, but like a good therapist, I
ask my actors where and how far they want to go.
We design the box, and then I keep them in it.
Although, sometimes, I want to play too...

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Distance.

NARRATOR

I'm human! And sometimes they want me to play with
them. Drama class is an adult playground, but I
make it a safer one. There, with these blowouts,
with the yelling and fighting, crying, in a
regular acting class, it might end with the
traditional acting coach saying...

(ACTING COACH appears, sitting,
talking to an invisible class.)

ACTING COACH

That was great. What a scene! I can't wait to see
it next week. Ya, crying? Good. You were in. We
loved it!

NARRATOR

Whereas, in my class, I might say...

(TIDAL turns to MARGE who's
crying.)

TIDAL

That was huge. Really emotional. You are probably going to be having some aftershocks from this. I'd like you to focus on taking care of yourself over the next week. You've done some very intense work.

(Pause.)

Take a deep breath.

RATIONALITY

So, you do a drama class with a therapeutic extension. You're a *nice* acting coach.

COMIC

Let's call his shtick ACTING WITH A NICE GUY!

(SPEAKER: "WE HAVE A NAME FOR
TIDAL'S CLASS: ACTING WITH A NICE
GUY!")

NARRATOR

No! Don't use that! It's not just acting. There is a therapeutic aspect!

COMIC

Next up: ARCHERY WITH A NICE GUY!

NARRATOR

No, it's not some random class! It's more than that! It's not acting class! It's not therapy! And I'm not nice!!!

(Blackout.)

NAMING II

(Rose convention hall.
NARRATOR sits with a wilted
rose at a booth with a sign:
"ACTING WITH A REALLY NICE
GUY".
Enter RATIONALITY in a suit
and a gigantic red rose.)

RATIONALITY

You should've called it "therapy". I did. Making a
mint. Don't worry, it sounds like your "actors"
are basically unaware therapy clients. Do your
little therapy thing and be happy.

NARRATOR

Maybe we're all unaware therapy clients. The
unconscious need to process one's psyche and to
express pushes some people towards drama, some
towards dance, some to art. But why not be an
actor? Being an actor means you might get paid for
your hidden shit too! Plus, the real world rarely
provides wish-fulfilment like drama does: "Who
wants to murder their boss they really hate?" "Who
wants to sleep with the secretary?"

COMIC

And then her husband!

RATIONALITY

Maybe you do do something more than "Acting with a
nice guy," but does anyone need to hear that?

NARRATOR

Acting is more than acting--as the public
understands it. The public thinks that they
consume it. But, theatre is primarily for the
actor--it's transformative.

(SCREEN: (Slowiak & Cuesta, 2007,
p. 12))

RATIONALITY

Audiences won't pay to see an actor's process.
They want entertainment! Why do you care what you
call it anyhow?

NARRATOR

Because definition is desire, and there are a lot of psychologists who are pushing me to believe their definitions.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Therapy is distinct: it's a science.

COMIC

Science?! Forsooth ye scientists!

(Singing)

IF YOU'RE ANAL AND YOU'RE FRETFUL, CLAP YOUR HANDS!

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Science--

COMIC

(Louder)

IF YOU'RE ANAL AND YOU'RE FRETFUL, CLAP YOUR HANDS!

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Science is--

COMIC

(Louder)

IF YOU'RE ANAL AND YOU'RE FRETFUL, AND YOU REALLY WANNA SHOW IT...

(Shouting)

Get thee into science!

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Science is, more important than art--or drama. Drama is just... well, we all know what it is. I don't have to say a thing.

NARRATOR

You mean it's cute? Drama's cute? To psychologists, "therapy" outweighs "drama": it's more serious. It's easier to study. And these same psychologists try to assert that talk-therapy is the be-all cure for psychological issues. It isn't, and, even if it was, I don't want *just* their cure! Even their *cure* is suspect.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

You want conflict. We can cure that.

NARRATOR

You want to *cure* the human condition! To obliterate conflict. If conflict is so bad, why do my actors show up week after week, attacking each other? To feel alive! If this desire to be alive is also a desire to be in conflict, which makes it essential to the human condition, why is therapy trying to reduce it? What are we suppose to be adapting to? When is conflict adaptive? What does one gain by stopping life's bloody flow?

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

How about a meditation workshop?

NARRATOR

This is a bigger fight.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

CBT? DBT? REBT? Something will calm you down. EFT with some Prozac?

NARRATOR

...this is a fight for soul of the human race.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Electroshock?

COMIC

Whoo hoo!

RATIONALITY

You're too ambitious. Just relax. Get paid...

NARRATOR

No, I want to show what I've learned over my last 20 years. How I see therapists and clients as actors in a drama. How I see actors as clients in therapy.

(SCREEN: "Drama is art of human relationships in action" (Barker, 2010, p. 122).
"All psychotherapy contains relational elements" (Finlay & Evans, 2009, p. 8).)

NARRATOR

Therapy makes clients do exactly what they should not be doing. It makes them give up power!

(Enter CLIENT)

CLIENT

Just tell me what to do! You're the professional. What would you do? You're a counsellor. Counsel me.

(Fade out CLIENT.)

RATIONALITY

She's got a point.

NARRATOR

Therapists hook people into believing *they* know what to do. Would we have clients if we told them, that we were "fellow travellers"?

(SCREEN: (Yalom, 1980, p. 6))

Just cozy bunkmates, despairing on life's anxious cruise ride with them? Would we get any business? People want someone who knows *something*. They want power. Knowledge. And therapists must desire, to know, *something*, even though we pretend otherwise. If we relinquish power, our fellow travellers try to grab the steering wheel...

(Enter COLEEN)

COLEEN

I'm not having fun. All these conflicts, can't we just have fun? I want more fun! I want more fun!

(She laughs and scurries about making faces, acting bizarre.)

NARRATOR

This traveller would have us endlessly laughing. Not that bad, but it's not drama. "Goodbye" other actors.

(To COLEEN)

Drama and conflict, or... the door.

(COLEEN exits)

I am not just a passenger in my client's world: I have needs. One of them is experiencing high conflict and emotions, and because of that, I define aspect's of reality, defining theatre and

therapy as I want. By defining, I harden and control reality. My desire for a specific experience makes it more likely as I cleave off others' ideas--their own units of control.

ROGERS

Doesn't sound like you're client-centred...

NARRATOR

Client-centred therapy is an impossibility Carl. Neither therapists nor clients can gut their selves and operate from some external and moral source while still pushing for their own desires. Anyhow, what happens if your client-focused therapist gets a client who wants Therapist-Focused Therapy?

(Rumbling starts. All actors start shaking like in an earthquake.)

RATIONALITY

Are you suggesting...

NARRATOR

That a quasi-Christianity, where God has transformed into social morays, lurks in therapy? That hatred of the self is evident in its abhorrence? That our cultural superego seeks to obliterate our ids and eviscerate our egos? Oh, therapists go to such lengths to get rid of themselves under the guise "it's for the client". Self-hatred is the core of your client-focus.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Bringing your self makes the therapy about you. Sacrilege!

NARRATOR

Who did you think part of this was about? I'm one half of the relationship. *I* was there. My self contains my "stuff". I will not buy your grand, self-less therapist, *Christian* role. If we dump our selves at the curb, how are we modelling self-actualization?

(SOUND: More rumbling; Monks chanting "Dirty Dirty Dirty" in the distance.)

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

You get your needs met in session? Naughty!

NARRATOR

Nonsense! By being there, I meet my needs. Do you work for free or something?

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Do you soil your sessions with your values too?

NARRATOR

Values define orientations that define behaviours. Using CBT means valuing it. I value drama, process, emotions and body-work. If my clients don't like it, I adapt. You want CBT? No problem: just a different scene for me.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Change your approach; toss your values. Convenient.

NARRATOR

I prioritize. If my approach fails, I change it. I push my agenda because I believe my illusion. Therapy and theatre work from a transfer of power. As a therapist and director, I start with my power and give only what people can utilize to limit awareness of their will. Knowing that you can make experience--life's existential responsibility--is scary!

RATIONALITY

Maybe they're just lazy?

NARRATOR

Laziness is existential angst transformed into stagnation. Drama and therapy transforms stagnation back to action. Observation to participation. While physical energy is needed, the will is more important, but it's scary! Others want to obliterate your self to controllable, "sociable" levels to reduce their anxiety. To let them get rid of your will is to live in a freedomless limbo--a spiritual suicide.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

The will might not exist: the self could be a social fabrication, just a pattern of behaviours...

NARRATOR

You want me to question my belief in the will, *my faith*, because it allows *your* will, hidden behind theories to get what you want. A will in plain view is a trillion times scarier than any theory. However, I believe in self *and* no self; will *and* no will: the paradox of existence, language, and our condition. And right now, I've got a lot of will!

(MONITOR: BUDDHA)

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Ah! Buddha! He'll answer it: does the self exist?

(BUDDHA smiles and fades to black.)

NARRATOR

Questions and the self are linguistic constructs. If someone asks me: "What's your name?" how can I answer if I don't have a symbol that allows an understanding of self? Do I exist if I can't communicate? Self and identity are created by language. Language and self are existentially co-mingled. The self is a process, a set of desires, which the organism creates to stabilize, survive, and thrive!

(Trashing booth.)

I am not *just* a nice guy who teaches acting. I am a teacher of the Will. That's drama: learning the will's role in society through awareness. And now I see why my class keeps me in power: no matter how hard I try to be just a facilitator, they *want* more. "He's my teacher, our leader!" I am an Autocatalyst: A Teacher of the Will through Drama!

(SOUND: Explosions. Other booths falling. Crashing noises.)

VENEER

(Parlour. Carnival noises are heard, like a circus tent.)

DESIREE

I come to drama class because I want to forget everything. Life has been hard. When I am here, I am someone else. Transported. Here, I am happy... free.

MARGE

For me, coming here to drama is just like... Ya... it's just like, wow. I feel like I am flying, like I'm on another planet, taken away from my boring life. It's addicting, and I need this fix.

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

Therapeutic clients don't want an explanation: they want an experience. Your actors should come to therapy.

TIDAL

Drama is like one extended Gestalt therapy experiment.

COMIC

You mean life?

MARGE

And what an experience! Underneath this sane veneer is a crazy lady: I do sanity really well. In drama though, when I take this mask off, and I am free again, it's exciting! I don't ski, but this is what it must be like to ski down a mountain at top speed. When I have no veneer, it's pure exhilaration.

FRITZ PERLS

(Smoking a joint.)

Loose your mind, and come to your senses.

FREUD

It's escapism. Your actors seek to get away from those behaviours that remind them of their failed selves.

NARRATOR

It's much, much, much more. They remove the old veneer and let out fresher ways of being. Unmasked, they become more fully human, relaxed. It feels wonderful. Drama is behavioural-yoga.

(TIDAL sits down and MARGE stands up.)

TIDAL

Take your time.

MARGE

(Like an abrasive, stand-up comedian.)

Don't tell me I'm not good enough!

TIDAL

Ok, let's try that again. What do you want to do?

MARGE

I want to sit.

(She sits.)

Don't tell me I'm not good enough.

TIDAL

I noticed your head went down slightly when you said that. Can you say it again with your head down?

MARGE

Don't tell me I'm not good enough.

TIDAL

Good. Just keep repeating that.

MARGE

Don't tell me I'm not good enough. Don't tell me I'm not good enough. Don't tell me I'm not good enough. I'm not good enough... I'm gonna cry.

NARRATOR

Everyone starts acting thinking they have to "be" a certain way. Mistake Numero Uno. I tell them that they can be anything. Acting is a continual process, where actors must find out who they really are in this fantasy situation. It never stops, even on opening night.

(CARL ROGERS appears between FRITZ PERLS and FREUD. He reluctantly takes a cigarette from FREUD.)

CARL ROGERS

Actors must find out who they are.

FRITZ PERLS

From moment to moment.

FREUD

Shedding defences.

CARL ROGERS

Sounds like...

FRITZ PERLS

Sounds exactly like...

CARL ROGERS, FRITZ PERLS,
AND FREUD

Therapy!

SAMANTHA

Oh, it's therapy all right! People like to use this class to get out their aggression.

(TIDAL sits and observes.)

LINDA

You're a terrible person!

SAMANTHA

I'm terrible? Look who's talking!

LINDA

You are worst than terrible! You're a bitch!

SAMANTHA

You're the bitch!

TIDAL

Scene! Wow. Nice. You guys really got into that! Really well done.

(Light down on SAMANTHA and LINDA.
NARRATOR turns to audience.)

But, I realized it wasn't "really well done". Was it dramatic? Yes, but some attacks are problematic. Drama offers a distance through roles

that some actors use for personal attacks. This is not helpful at the start of drama training.

FREUD

Drama as another veneer?

NARRATOR

Veneers have their place. In drama, like psychology, we must understand: Why the front? What's authentic? Is this the core, or another shell?

DESIREE

What about if you disappear completely? In my last scene, I was not there. Am I going crazy?

CLINICAL SUPERVISOR

A psychotic break.

(SCREEN: "Great acting can be almost a psychotic mix of self-consciousness and unself-consciousness. And that's the terrible conflict. You have to be free to jump off into that volcano and you have to be pathologically self-conscious."—Alex Baldwin)

NARRATOR

Is psychosis a continuum? Sanity being one side where awareness of a normal, real self occurs, and full psychosis on the other, where awareness is seemingly gone, with behaviours that seem completely novel and scary. We go about our lives mostly without awareness. We just do: vacuum, shower, etc. No need to think. When we perceive behaviours as strange, *after* we've done them, it might feel like we have lost contact with reality. We might feel psychotic.

RATIONALITY

Label those behaviours as psychotic then.

NARRATOR

That's what we do... It's scary when I think about what we are doing: in drama, and in some therapeutic interventions, we encourage people to lose contact with reality...

BUDDHA

And reality is what again?

TIDAL

(Pause.)

No different than fantasy. Yes! So my actors are not going anywhere. Psychotic breaks that actors have are just as valid as our group version of democratic reality. They are experiencing individual realities, but these realities are just as real for them as our individual realities are for each of us. And it's in those moments, the moments where the transitional object--

(SCREEN: (Winnicott, 2005, pp. 2-19))

--becomes the very behaviours of the self. Actors become their own transitional object. The self becomes the vehicle to its next version. The self, usually an object, becomes weakened, becomes a transitional object, then submerges completely into the subjective reality of the dramatic moment. Then, a new self emerges and objectifies itself again to maintain a sense of reality and consistency. It's therapeutic!

LINDA

I know we are picking new scenes for next week. Can I have a scene where I get to attack a man?

RATIONALITY

You're saying that she wants to allow a new transitional object into her reality, the angry-capable-Linda, so that she can play with it, and hopefully evolve.

NARRATOR

In the class, she did just that; but, when I asked her about the intense anger she displayed, she said...

LINDA

Oh, I would never get that mad at anyone in my house. I just get mad here.

RATIONALITY

So, the desire to play with the transitional object did not yet outweigh her fear of showing her real anger towards her family.

MARGE

I'd like to be anyone *but* Samantha, but I don't want a dialogue with too much swearing. If my daughter heard me swearing like that, she wouldn't know who I was.

NARRATOR

And some want to be different, but not *too* different. They want to stay close to their transitional object to keep their anxiety down. But some people want to be very far from who they are--they can withstand more distance from their transitional object and the increased anxiety this creates. Anxiety and the distance from one's perception of reality--especially the self-concept--are correlated.

RATIONALITY

Does acting encourage a split in consciousness? Do you encourage another aloofness while one side is traumatized? Is awareness, this third person observer, just plain disassociation? Is awareness consciousness?

(Enter BUDDHA who holds up a rose.)

TIDAL

There is no split: it's all just one experience. All splitting is Mind. When a killer kills and says that they saw themselves do it, they are causing the split *and* pretending not to know. They are hiding from their own awareness: their power to create reality and its multiple levels of awareness. It makes me wonder how far down the hole, how far away from ourselves, we can go...

RATIONALITY

How much are you willing to let go?

FAITH

(A church. It's summer time.
Hot and sweaty.

SCREEN: "Art is a lie that
helps us to realize the
truth."--Pablo Picasso)

(Light up on MARGE and NARRATOR.)

NARRATOR

Marge's all action, unconsciously blocking her
desires. Side-to-side, changing focus, trying to
discover who she is. But when she lets go,
relaxes, releases, she stops "doing" and becomes.
Freedom is within relaxation, and sometimes,
laughter.

MARGE

But I have to get my lines perfect.

TIDAL

Be perfectly imperfect.

MARGE

How do I do it like I did the last time? Last time
was so good.

NARRATOR

When they do well, they want to do "it" again. But
performance is the self--which is a process; you
can't do "it" again.

(To MARGE.)

All you can do is create the specific conditions
for your potentials to be at their highest, and
then get out of your way.

(SCREEN: "Study and rehearsal are
preparation for a process." --

Barker (2010, p. 122))

The more real you are, the less concerned you are
with product... and the better the illusion.

MARGE

But what if I get *too good* at this? If I expose
too much of myself? The swearing in this monologue
is really extreme. If I did this people would
think I'm a bitch!

TIDAL

It's up to you. How much courage do you have? You're right to be concerned though: people will choose when to separate you as an actor from your role, depending on how scared they are of the behaviours displayed. They go from "You were so good in that role" to "Oh, I didn't realize you were like *that*."

NARRATOR

Actors hide and reveal our shadows. It creates fear in others. "What could they do to me?" Coming from my family, I learned about these shadows--those savage cores underneath our pleasant facades; but in time, I've seen love there too. In drama, I expose these cores to understand my world better, for I trust you if I see your core. If you obscure with words, position, science, or logic, I smell a snake not revealed. Instead, meet me in the dark world of the theatre, let's remove our masks, and see each other naked. In illusion, I see reality.

RATIONALITY

What's the illusion of drama then?

NARRATOR

Drama is a socially accepted confrontation with an anxious ego--an ego that wants to control and prevent change, to veil the id's bubbling desire. By maintaining this unawareness, by skirting contact, the ego acts. Drama pushes for an honest, flexible, and emotional response to desire to override the ego. Frustrated by the situation, the teacher, and their own inner battles, the actor finally lets go, allowing behaviours to flow. Unimpeded by ego, the id is emancipated. The third-party observer, awareness, the Source, Grace, or whatever religious term you want, observes, letting the super-ego control as it chooses. This release and subsequent awareness feels more grounded, more "real," increasing the stage illusion as the actor connects to their Truth as their real desires and emotions reveal. Viscerally connected, the audience cannot articulate what has occurred exactly, but senses the moment it does. When a scene like this is done, the actor is changed forever, but wishes to

transcend himself again. To see his or her id, ego, and super-ego, all simultaneously, by seeing the self as it truly is--self-running and self-generating--the actor, whoever they are now, can deepen their acting and life. Moving on to higher psychological states, higher acting potentials, drawn to the Source as it gazes within.

RATIONALITY

With all this spiritualist talk right now, I've been wondering: "Do I really count?" I mean, I've been trying to run this show for years. Now, I feel... kind of ridiculous. Small.

NARRATOR

Hey, you're a good guy sometimes. I know you want the best for me. But I also know you don't really exist. You are the ultimate actor. I want to take care of you too. You're a part of this, and not a part of this. But I know what your food is: a good role now and then.

RATIONALITY

You've got some?! I could really use one right now...

NARRATOR

Don't worry. There's always another.

RATIONALITY

I think, therefore I am--right?

NARRATOR

Thinking, therefore there's thinking...

RATIONALITY

It's all very confusing: I mean, I've always been there for you. Will you still be there for me? Now that you know me?

NARRATOR

You've always been there. Just keep acting, keep doing. You'll be fine. I'll believe in you.

RATIONALITY

It's hard to trust that. I'm not sure. I'm not really sure. How can I be sure? I think therefore

I am! I think therefore I am. I am starting to dissolve. Oh? Oh my... Oh God.

(Begins freaking out as he dissolves.)

NARRATOR

Just believe me. Have faith.

RATIONALITY

What? I... I... How though? Just... let go? Oh... Oh... Okay.

(Starts to re-appear)

I believe in you.

NARRATOR

Promise, we're as safe as houses...

RATIONALITY

As long as I remember who's wearing the trousers?

(MUSIC: "Never Let Me Down Again"; Depeche Mode. "I'M TAKING A RIDE WITH MY BEST FRIEND. I HOPE HE NEVER LET'S ME DOWN AGAIN. HE KNOWS WHERE HE'S TAKING ME, TAKING ME WHERE I WANT TO BE, I'M TAKING A RIDE WITH MY BEST FRIEND. WE'RE FLYING HIGH, WE'RE WATCHING THE WORLD PASS US BY. NEVER WANT TO COME DOWN, NEVER WANT TO PUT MY FEET BACK DOWN ON THE GROUND.")

(*Depeche Mode - Never Let Me Down Again (Remastered Video)*, 2009). RATIONALITY and NARRATOR get into a hot car and drive off.

SCREEN: "We act to stop acting; by stripping away our selves, the clarity of Truth astonishes."—Tidal Grace)

Discussion

Writing this stage play was cathartic, informative, and a lot of work. It showed me that I have many voices that all vie for attention, and that several themes were bubbling simultaneously between those voices. Through writing this play, I could tease them apart while discovering interconnections between. Many of the emergent themes were deeply philosophical. Here is the list of the themes covered in the following discussion:

- Desire, its importance, its relationship to the will/self/power, and how it constructs meaning through language;
- Self as ultimate defence and survival mechanism;
- The self's use of veneers and actualization for power;
- Awareness: its affect on therapy and drama training—the conceptual splits between body-focused/Gestalt therapies vs. talk/CBT therapies,
- Psychology's ambivalent relationship with sexuality;
- The relevance of *communitas* and environment to learning;
- The pitfalls of drama;
- Real vs. professional caring;
- Reality vs. fantasy;
- Science/knowledge/rationalism vs. art/faith/spiritualism;
- Power vs. submission;

- And, drama as therapy vs. therapy as drama.

Desire

Desire appears similarly in drama and therapy. Clients and actors both lust after self knowledge to reach and understand their innate potentials; they want to feel free from past associations and memories; and, they want to have intimacy in social relationships that have so far (typically) been unattainable or unsatisfactory in real life. To do this, to enter a deeper self-connection and confrontation, both clients and actors must be able to endure a certain amount of conflict; if they cannot, they will fail in their quests, and are relegated to repeating past behaviours as if in a behavioural-limbo. It is in the heat of conflict, stemming from desire, in which potentials and new scenes/lived-worlds are revealed.

For actors and clients, in the psychotherapeutic tradition, the driving force of desire is the self—a.k.a. the will or the “self-fuelled” fire (Boehme, 1992, p. xvii). Unlike this tradition though, Hegel (Hyppolite, 1979, pp. 146–7), Hartle (1997, p. 48), and Buddhist philosophy (Webster, 2005, p. 267) are more in line with my thinking: I do not separate self and desire; instead I see *self as desire*. Particularly, I see that through thought, the self constructs conflict—the self “[creates] the I/World duality through the act of desiring” (2005, p. 37), thereby furthering its own existence, and extending the samsaric illusion. The thought process embedded in this desiring-self process is constructed and aided by social linguistic patterns (language) (Mead, 1967, pp. 122, 192), and this process creates meaning, and hence food on which the self snacks to further sustain itself (pp. 78-80). For both client and

actor, meaning then becomes the essential construction unit of experience: with its narrative quality, it delivers a sense of forward momentum—*self-actualization*—that allows individuals the feeling of progressive change, a feeling that begets even more meaning, and hence self. Rinse. Repeat. The cycle of meaning and desire further encrusts to form a seemingly semi-solid self.

Although psychologists have long since posited that individual defense mechanisms help individuals stave off anxiety (Freud, 2011, pp. 59, 69), I counter that *the whole self—not just some components—is utilized as a defense against existential angst*; that is, to have existential angst, one must believe in and concoct/acquire a self, and then subsequently fear the loss of that object. This fear—the ultimate fear—creates mountains of anxiety, produces a clinging to reality/desire, neurosis, therapy, etc. (Roberts, 1993, pp. 180–1). In both therapy and drama, when clients and actors start shifting their ideas of *whom* they are, even slightly, this behaviour produces intense agitation (also known as *disintegration anxiety*) (Lewis-Fernández, 2010, p. 53). It appears that most clients and actors spend their lives trying to stabilize a sense of self, with the aid of various self-esteem programmes, self-actualization workshops, rationalizations, etc., only to realize (hopefully) that self is not an entity but simply a process. This shifting sense of self, this unreality of our core essence (Berger, 2005), is particularly unpalatable to the populace who would rather like their self to be reified as stable (and hence less anxiety filled). The realization of one's own absurd nothingness, and subsequent follow-up efforts to stabilize it, is part of my teachings in *my* drama class. Do I directly state this purpose? No. I let people come to their own conclusions once they

have seen enough versions of themselves that they start to question their own materiality and substance. Has anyone come to this conclusion yet? No, but I think some are starting to question it. This is high-minded, academic thinking and I do not expect my students to venture here unless they feel so compelled.

I am not completely critical of the self though: it serves a purpose as the interface between the organism and its desires (Falk, 2004, p. 268). The self provides desire the stability to achieve power (making self-actualization a covetous power grab): the individual is seeking to establish more territory in his/her world, to have knowledge/power. Desire for self-knowledge is a desire for self-power. However, the self, being a procedural veneer, cannot see itself (Haney, 1998, p. 65); instead, the self *believes* in itself. This act of creating a stable self when none exists is the major problem with therapy: it encourages clients to augment/stabilize a “disrupted” sense of self (Bateman, Karterud, & Van Den Bosch, 2007, p. 297; Horowitz, 1997, p. 92; Stone, 2009, p. 44) through all sorts of self-focusing techniques: from narrative to cognitive therapy, from emotionally focused life histories to Alderian family trees. “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” and “How can I be better at ____ (fill-in-the-blank)?” become therapy’s central questions. Similarly, drama also encourages actors to access their core desires/selves, but its distinction lies in the fact that it does not try to stabilize these concepts into static identities. Instead, drama suggests—through its inherent nature—a more procedural existence. In the place of therapy’s question of “Who are you?” drama asks: “What are you *doing now*?”

Awareness

Drama training and some therapies (like Gestalt, psychoanalysis, and existential therapy) seek to increase awareness and then have individuals act upon this augmented nature (Capuzzi & Gross, 2003, p. 143; Jones-Smith, 2011, p. 268; Yontef, 1993, p. 201). To decrease the anxiety that an increase in awareness often elicits, drama and drama therapy use *transitional objects* (e.g., roles, characters, and masks). These objects provide distance between an actor's self-view and their possible new behavioural patterns. Therapy too uses transitional objects (such as in Gestalt therapy's 1- and 2-chair techniques), but more often uses intellectually oriented talk-therapy as the main driver of awareness; then, it exposes clients to cognitive stimuli such as memories, events, or thoughts while offering a chance to try out novel/rarely used behaviours to adapt to their new awareness.

The benefit of drama is that it uses the entire environment as part of an individual's awareness—not just cognitive stimuli. Most talk therapies do not: they utilize just the client's awareness of their thoughts and then try to talk the client through those thoughts. Alas, most clients have already been very busy doing exactly this, pre-therapy, without results. Analogous to working with actors stuck on a stage but do not know what they are doing there, I have found that getting clients from thinking about “*why* they are stuck” into actively *doing* and direct environmental confrontation yield better results. Activity encourages people to interact with others, holistically understanding their own operations and adaptations, allowing them to satisfy their desires while acting within social conventions. Actors are also taught relational- and body-awareness too—two

domains which traditional psychotherapy does not cover in any significant way (albeit, it appears now that psychotherapy is “discovering” these ideas again that have existed in drama for thousands of years).

Unlike my respect for drama therapy that typically unpacks drama work for the individual, I am critical of drama classes’ use of transitional objects but the lack of unpacking of their personal meaning to the actor; instead, actors in training are typically asked to reveal *in character* what the scene means to them. This is very much like drama therapy’s sub-culture called *dramatic transformations*: their proponents believe that any insight work must happen outside the therapeutic space (Landy, 2007, p. 174). I believe the contrary: it is important to pose questions *in the space*—which may or may not be answered—so that at least some take away, some intellectual processing, is available to the actor personally. It is akin to planting a seed in a mind that may later blossom to deliver some beneficial crossover effect between an actor’s scene and their real life.

That said, actors are usually cut off from this process, feel off-kilter during the time they are working on a role. A transcript from Sir Anthony Hopkins interview on Oprah (“The Greatest - Oprah.com,” 2005) is telling:

Oprah has always wanted to interview Sir Anthony Hopkins. His incredible performances put him in a league all his own. From his heart attack in *Meet Joe Black* to his disturbing portrayal of Hannibal Lector in *Silence of the Lambs*, some of his roles are so convincing, Oprah admits she’s often worried about Sir Hopkins.

Oprah: When you take on the energy of that character, you do it so well. I wonder, how are you able to just release that and then go on with your life?

Anthony: I guess it does affect me! ... I think it does get into your nervous system because the body doesn't know what's happening.

Also recall the recent suspicions that Heath Ledger allegedly committed suicide from his over-involvement with his Joker character in *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008). There are countless tales of such psychic conflicts between an actor's self and character. These conflicts leave individual actors to cope using maladaptive behaviours (i.e., drinking, drugs, etc.) to "get their characters out of them" (Fisher & Fisher, 1981, p. 159) because the seriousness of the act of role taking is either dismissed or considered a simple job hazard by the drama world. I have seen that, without proper discussion after a scene, many actors will tend to disintegrate under layers of new defenses to cope with psychological discrepancies between their selves and their transitional objects, all of which just increases volatility and pathology.

Rationality vs. emotionalism

While psychotherapy strives for adaptive response through rationality, using emotions as insight tools to achieve understanding, drama and dramatherapy both push for desire and emotions as ways towards "truthful" behaviour in a scene (drama) and in real life (dramatherapy), while minimizing rationality as a defence from achieving these goals (Emunah, 1994, p. 302; Schrader & Roose-Evans, 2011, p. 75; Weston, 2003, p. 13). All three focus on *product*: psychotherapy (Plante, 2010, p.

250) and drama therapy (Jennings, 1994, p. 17) focus on the adaptive response or self coherency, while drama focuses on performance. My drama work, however, focuses on *process*: on an individual's present and transitional states of awareness in the situations that the individual finds himself or herself. In my work, there is no end point—just endless insights into individual conditions. My work is similar to life but it is greatly accelerated.

Although traditional drama instructors view intellectualization negatively, I find value in it. Rationality's value lies in its ability to provide a bridge for the actor's psyche from the stage to their real world. Bringing an enhanced ability to act on instincts and emotions, and discard social norms, although exhilarating, is dangerous, and potentially destructive in our social world. Instead, actors would benefit in understanding the connections and discrepancies between their on-stage and off-stage behaviours, as well as their personal evaluations of their on-stage personas. In my class, I use many exercises to elicit these understandings and psychical syntheses.

Psychology's ambivalent relationship with sexuality

Psychotherapy and drama training have different attitudes towards sex and sexuality. First, examine the counselling psychology degree programmes across Canada and the United States. Where are the *required* sexuality courses? Does the dearth of such programmes reveal a deeper ambivalence and anxiety towards the sexuality? One of humanity's most intimate behavioural activities is almost completely left out of psychotherapeutic training. When mentioned in my family

counselling class, my professor continuously referred to “sex” (always slightly under her breath) by chuckling! Instead of teaching the topic herself, she had me present “Sexuality” to my fellow students in a 20-minute presentation to a sniggering class (a class who was obviously agitated by the subject too). In total, I have had 20-minutes of sexuality training in my counselling psychology Masters in three years. Am I to assume that I am competent to address the sexuality concerns of the populace in my therapeutic practice? It is sad and wholly inadequate.

Drama and dramatherapy, on the other hand, have more grounded attitudes towards sexuality. They take the topic on directly. Plays are littered with sexual references, visuals, and innuendos. Drama therapy participants often come up with sexualized scenes. Actors are often called upon to get into blunt and compromising sexual positions and dynamics. I remember doing a scene from *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* where I had to play a glorious transsexual in a seedy prison who gets raped by a fellow inmate. Would I ever see such a precarious topic covered in psychotherapy training? Why do I bother with questions when the answer is obvious?

The relevance of *communitas* and environment to learning

In therapy, there is no *communitas*—there is no intense community spirit from individuals experiencing liminality together. However, in drama and dramatherapy, *communitas* exists and is welcomed. In individual therapy, a client visits a therapist who is ethically bound not continue the relationship with them after termination. Likewise, even in group therapy (where one could imagine

communitas), members are advised not to carry on personal relationships between each other (Ford, 2006, p. 116). In psychotherapy, the effort is to wean the client off the therapeutic relationship and to get them into “real” relationships (Charman, 2004, p. 277). This idea detracts from the therapeutic relationship though: clients are told on one hand to trust their therapist, which they do (e.g., Client: “Finally, *someone* is listening to me!”) and then are dismissed by that same therapist who must adhere to laughably “ethical” distance rules. However, this makes sense, considering the divisive and competitive nature of our commercially based society. The therapy society has created is a direct result and symbolic referent of its façade. Commercial therapy only *looks* friendly, but its essence is as an educational forum that teaches adaptation, competition, and survival. “We care, but not *really*—get some real friends!” That is the kind-hearted postscript after termination for *all* psychotherapeutic clients.

Drama is different than psychotherapy in that it offers a sense of intense community spirit. Actors can mingle, and are free to see each other after the work. Albeit, traditional drama class is commercial too, with interpersonal networking as one of its most important aspects, its level of caring varies depending on the individuals within. Unlike therapy, a drama class’s postscript is more “We care—especially if you know an important director!”

In my drama class, there is a sense of connection that neither psychotherapy nor group work engenders. It is a class where seniors have joined a volunteer drama programme to share their emotions, to self-actualize, and to socialize. It is a site where the relationships between participants and facilitator are not restricted. We

give each other distance (like good friends), but we also go out often for coffee after and between classes. My class also builds community. We construct and write scenes and plays together, we sometimes present them to the wider community, and we are known in the community for our creative, and often risky, work that we do. Our postscript has always been a huggable: "Sorry to see you go. We still care about you, so let's keep in touch. Let's do lunch!"

I am not suggesting that *communitas* through drama is not the "cure" to pathology. The benefits of *communitas*, "the joy, healing, the 'gift of seeing', [etc.]" (Turner & Turner, 2011, p. xli), are not possible for all in a group, especially if some members are particularly on the outside of that group. For example, some members who have joined our group have had hidden psychological traumas. When these members' traumas were exposed, and the owners wanted to recede from them (or change the class curriculum to relieve their anxiety), they had to, in the end, decide if they wanted to continue in drama (and the group) with its built-in conflict (which could easily trigger their trauma). Here, *communitas* alone was not an effective agent against pathology. Perhaps these members who did not feel safe in a group, would have favoured more individual work? If so, an individualized therapy scene would have been preferred.

The pitfalls of professionalism

In both drama and psychotherapy, the word "professional," besides its other elitist and superior connotations that point towards meritocracy (Dzur, 2008, p. 6),

has other negative associations for me. Actors, directors, and therapists use the concept of professionalism as a guise for disconnection and distance from others.

In therapy, given its commercial-nature, boundaries and professional distance are important (especially given the time-constraints in sessional work) and a *sine qua non* for clinical work (“The ethics of dual relationships,” 2008, p. 4); but, I have also seen therapists over-use professionalism to alienate and distance themselves from clients—“Time is up. No. We can’t talk anymore. I will see you in the next session.” Then, instead of coping to what they are doing—namely, establishing their own boundaries to quieten their own anxiety—these same therapists turn it around: “I was teaching my client boundaries”.

In drama, “professional” actors are those that can go into their character, come out, and be seemingly unscathed psychologically from the experience. Actors who cannot are derogated as unprofessional: “Oh, she shouldn’t take what I said so personally. I was just acting!” In these moments, the more professional (a.k.a. “disconnected”) actor dismisses the humanity of their partner.

Problems with drama

Drama has other issues too. Specifically, its lack of a therapeutic extension after an actor does intensive emotional work is problematic; so much so, its activities would be considered highly unethical by counselling psychology standards. Instead, drama teachers typically leave actors to cope and process emotions and self-insights *by themselves* after pushing them into extremely emotional work. Drama instructors’ lack of follow-up caring and/or teaching on the

dangers of intense identity work can lead some actors towards dangerous and maladaptive coping mechanisms (i.e., depression, drug and alcohol use, etc.).

Second, the potential and actual abuse of drama is relatively unknown. Drama is more psychologically intense than any psychotherapy session I have ever witnessed; however, it is *psychotherapy* that is licensed and regulated, with its practitioners having to study for at least 8-10 years before they can start individual client work. Drama, on the other hand, has instructors who can just pop out of the woodwork, running aspiring actors through exhaustive emotional work without a care. I also believe that drama instructors, and the public, are unaware that the level of work done in an penetrating drama class is akin to, and above, some of the most seasoned experiential therapy sessions out there. I have also witnessed drama instructors, who do not follow a code of professional ethics like therapists, doing all sorts of contemptible behaviours: sexually abusing, personally denigrating, and conspiring against individual actors—all under the purview that they are helping them become better thespians (or dangling carrots like the chance to network with “people in the industry”). When drama instructors have a low moral fibre, their training can be a seedy and psychologically damaging affair.

Real vs. professional caring

In this process of growing, the object is not one’s own self, but the absolute dignity involved in the self’s striving to implant God in the human heart. It is a change that makes a fire flare up in the hidden recesses of the heart, where the fuel is virtue. (Helin & Lindström, 2003, p. 420)

In my play, I bring up the distinction between real and professional caring. To me, *real* caring is inappropriate in psychotherapy; that is, ethical standards mandate that therapists deliver *professional* caring. I also state that drama class can deliver real caring while therapy cannot. But these definitions, “real” and “professional” are my own. What do I mean by them? The dictionary defines general “caring as the feeling and exhibiting concern and empathy for others” (The Free Dictionary, n.d.). If I think of myself as a therapist, I have felt concern and empathy for others, so I am *caring* by definition; however, when my client leaves own session, I do not extend my caring, and that demonstrates one of the professional boundaries that therapists must have. Second, the way that I *really* care is often physical with sprinkles of encouragement: I give hugs, *long* hugs, and tell people, “Things will be alright. They always work out.” These caring behaviours are frowned upon in professional work: so my personal way of caring, even in session, differentiates itself from my professional way. Ethical concerns present me with a continuing ethical dilemma: I have to choose between authenticity and professionalism.

Scholars have a more expansive view on caring. Morse et. al (1990) breaks caring down into five epistemological perspectives: caring as a human trait, a moral imperative/ideal, an affect, an interpersonal relationship, and a nursing intervention. If caring is a human trait, a “basic way of being in the world” (pg. 4) that has been synthesized with social institutional practice to produce “bureaucratic caring” (Ray, 1989), then my issue with therapy is that it needs to be more honest with clients about this synthesis. As direct as possible, given the dynamics of the therapy session, therapists should delineate the type of caring that they will provide

as “limited and professional” and elucidate what this means; yet, gunning for trust and transference, therapists are often reluctant to provide this information. Instead, therapists imply they care but provide no caveats (and worse, they *believe* that they really care). Clients are led to believe that someone *really* does care about them, and are understandably distressed in termination when they realize the limits of psychotherapeutic caring. What I learned from therapy is that I will never receive love from my parents, that real caring exists outside therapeutic relationships, and that I must learn to stand on my two feet. The problem with this limited knowledge transfer is that life is far more than just standing by oneself and becoming a better adaptive responder. It is also about higher concepts and experiences like love and togetherness, goodness, freedom, real caring and passion—all things that drama welcomes and provides in spades.

Is not *all* caring essentially limited though? Logically, we must all find our ways in the world, even if we had good parental supports. So, where did I come up with this idea of extreme caring without limits? Emotionally, I feel that if my parents showed me even a hint of caring, I would not have this expectation of others now. I ask of people “Do you *really* care for me?” and then quickly relate this to sacrifice: “Will you sacrifice for me?” If not, then I put you in my parent’s category: “You don’t *really* care. You’re just like my self-absorbed parents.” This thinking pattern for me, my need for sacrifice, is deep but controlled by rationality. On the surface, I have learnt that sacrifice is a sin in psychotherapy—even society has characterized it as a personality defect—a self-defeating behaviour (Helin & Lindström, 2003); yet, in my

depths, I support the concept of sacrifice, cognizant that I am capable of delivering it myself.

What is in me in my moments of sacrificial demanding of others? Transferred from my original parental objects, and veiled in my self's perceptual distortion layers, there could lay a figurative search for a higher power. My superego could be saying: "I want to find God—that needless, unlimited, endlessly caring Goodness; yet, now that I have seen that you, Mom and Dad (and anyone else), are not that, I have anger." Have I transferred this anger to a disdain for therapists who work for money and reduce people to clients? In my play I state: "No Visa? No regard." Have I relocated this anger to therapists who are stopped expressing their essential goodness through professional boundaries? Construed from postmodernity that attacks self-sacrifice, through individuals who find it difficult to see anything meaningful in sacrifice that "advocates desistence from personal interests" (Helin & Lindström, 2003, p. 421), psychotherapy's professional boundaries, meant to stabilize its therapists' self-constructs, say clearly to clients: "My self is more important than yours. 50-minutes is up. Your session is over."

While there can be no sacrifice in psychotherapy, the same is not true of my drama work. In my class, I encourage actors' self-concepts to be loosely tied down. Doing so, I find that individuals are more likely to experience their essential goodness (revealing a Rogerian understanding of the soul within me), than when they are rigidly tied to keeping their selves intact. When actors categorically release who they think they are, it is in those moments that they appear possessed, and afterwards, the afterglow of the experience is exceptionally positive. It is in those

moments, when personal boundaries are dissolved, that individuals have sacrificed their self to the audience and the dramatic moment. It is in the dramatic then, as I create it for my class, that *real caring* is possible—and observed. When an individual actor feels horrible after one of my classes, most of the class is absorbed into thinking about them. Other individuals go out of their way to contact them and to provide comfort beyond the classroom setting. When I see my actors, and myself, doing this, I know that real caring occurs in and between drama classes.

Reality vs. fantasy

I seem plagued/blessed in my life by essential questions. Reading philosophy from an early age has created this perceptual filter; although, perhaps I was already screwed up and my philosophical ontology just gave my self a structure on which to anchor itself. I am aware of reality, but feel outside of it—I question it constantly. The idea of being screwed up, most likely from my mother who stated unrelentingly that there was “Something wrong with me,” and that I was “in a daze,” still haunts me today. I see this idea in this work. I admit that I am a bit bewildered, a bit dazed, but that condition produces artistic work of merit. However, I do not accept that there is something *wrong* with me (or my confusion); in its place, I believe that there is something mysterious, special, and good about “me”—whatever that may or may not be.

My childhood of intellectual confusion, coupled with severe parental neglect, may have led me to write about these master therapists like Freud and Perls mocking me, laughing at my fantastical displacement of my need for parental love

onto professional therapists. Worse, is that this play has shown me that I have entered into a profession where the desire to give love or make personal connections is thwarted by a professional code, one that implicitly states: “Keep your distance.” So, my search for intimate connections continues to be stymied, and this play’s ending symbolizes this. It shows how much I have needed a friend (and preferably one with a strong intellectual capacity), but tragically, that new friend turns out to be just a part of my self—my own rationality. I am stuck with my self, making friends and amends to my psychic components, and driving off into the sunset like a true romantic (or a narcissist, as some have shouted already). My narcissistic loop of sensations, desire, and perceptual reality returns back to my own fictive creations: my self. Does this underline that the self is just narcissism at its core? The self: I have been it in a mind’s eye as an bright energy ball, tentacles stretching out in white, laser blue, trashing about, looking for sensation to feed upon.

Science/knowledge/mind vs. art/faith/body

Art and science, emotions and rationality, body and mind: these famous anti-couples swirl before me as I have pondered the differences between psychotherapy, drama therapy, and drama.

Coming into the psychology world, I was introduced to science and rationality. I enjoyed the mental gymnastics of logic, critiques, and even statistics; however, in comparison to my previous life in the arts, it all left me feeling dry and distant. Then, after going into counselling psychology, I felt this pervasive feeling

there too. It was as though art and spiritualism were a *faux pas*—to even edge near them, like exploring Buddhist psychology, was playing with fire. When I made enquiries into these topics, supervisors generally ran or presented their disinterest with silence. In my Masters’ degree at UBC, there were no required courses on spiritualism, no higher-minded workshops, no professors who outwardly “believed” anything (at least as far as their research suggested). The deeper thoughts of existence, reality, love, passion, and sexuality, were all mysteriously absent, while adaptive response cycles, operant conditioning, statistical analyses of meditational techniques, and neuroplasticity advances were all hung before me as my new gods. Has psychology, in its quest to quantify and atomize the human psyche, lost its initial point? It may be a point that I am still trying to understand, but I am at least on that quest, unlike the majority of psychologists I have encountered who have publicly given up on their missions.

Psychotherapy bestows lip service on clients who tangle with art, faith, and spiritualism. Is psychotherapy an art that, feeling embarrassed about its artfulness, is trying to rid itself of its artful beginnings and refashion itself into a science? This desire to be scientific not only reduces psychotherapy’s broad appeal, it destabilizes it. Psychotherapeutic knowledge is becoming too specific. Students come out into the field with scant understanding of their own philosophical roots and humanity. It is as if we are creating an inverted pyramid of knowledge—a plethora of psycho-trivia meta-studies supported by a minute base of philosophical and spiritual gusto. And psychotherapy students, most of them young and naïve, have such a limited knowledge about life and its bigger picture—*can* they work with clients at all? That

is, how can you teach, when you have barely your own life philosophy to offer beyond, “I care. I like people. And, I *love* working with kids! I co-researched a study into the marijuana uptake effects on co-morbid pathological rat behaviour!”

Drama and, to a lesser extent, drama therapy’s, anti-rational bents feel ironically logical in the face of science’s endless dividing process of reality encapsulation. Soaked in art, faith, and spiritualism, both fields are better suited to take on life’s bigger questions. Drama and drama therapy are also suited to *bring up* the bigger questions—something that many psychologists would rather ignore, unless clients specifically address them. With its intensely emotional training into the soul’s depths, drama, and to some extent drama therapy, can offer psychology students a perspective that informs them from themselves, rather than lectures to them from outside. Unlike drama therapy though, which is centred more on a mental health perspective, drama’s more expansive nature can also be problematic: dogma and religious attitudes pervade this emotional cult, and critical thinking and research can be often ignored in favour of fervour.

In faith, I trust

Through my play, I have realized that faith is stronger than power/knowledge, for it is only through faith that one can step out on stage or life, naked with one’s open wounds, where the process of the self—an actor’s Truth—reveals. I envision actors who think too much, limiting their behaviours and actions: clumsy and fake, they are like neurotic clients, never quite doing what they want; mired in thinking, their desiring tinderbox never catches fire. These bad actors

squander time through rationality. Looking to it to reveal their desires and love, they mistake the cognitive apparatus as the life force. What dryness I see in these desert souls. Where is their oasis of love to wallow by?

This makes me remember a meeting I had with a professor emeritus in psychology. I sat in his office, looking at the papers sliding off his desk and his diplomas askew on his wall, hearing that he just completed forty years of service to his cognitions, and was retiring the next day. This tattered professor dumped a large compendium of thick and scruffy books before me. “There!” his withered lips declared. “That is what I did with my life here at UBC. Over two hundred studies. What do you think?” I beheld his beseeching gaze. It scanned me imploringly, desperate to get some vindication from anyone for a life’s folly. His hands slightly trembled—early Parkinson’s? His moving boxes sat barely filled. As a student just coming into academia, trying to look thrilled for this dusty life summary that lay flummoxed before me, I managed to say, “That’s something.”

Relationship between psychotherapies and drama

Drama shares territory with particular psychotherapies. In short-term therapy, the need to understand one’s self and its relationships with its world is dismissed. Solution-focused and cognitive-behavioural therapists are like bad directors who prefer to deal efficiently and focus on product not process. Like directors who place actors on a stage, directing them exactly what to do, and how to think, these therapists are similarly goal-, thought-, and behaviour-oriented. However, long-term depth psychotherapies, which focus on process and less on

results, share a common bond with drama. For example, in psychoanalysis, analysts will plumb a client's psyche to see how their self fits together; Gestalt therapists will focus clients in the present, pushing them to experiment and be creative.

In comparison to drama, most psychotherapy is limited. Talking alone does not consider or touch the whole person. Even the therapies that try to be holistic, by incorporating a body or sensory awareness, fall short in comparison to drama because they do not have clients question the philosophical concepts of reality and fantasy. For example, if clients take self-constructed reality and their desires *too seriously*, they begin to act as if in a play, truly believing consequential reality. Reality becomes *real*, and there is no ontological question about it! These clients are similar to actors who become psychotic and cannot see their role—they fail to see the immateriality of existence. Good actors, however, learn to *react* not act: when something does not go according to plan, actors switch up behaviours, change, and become something else. While drama instructors teach actors to be in the moment, improvising according to their momentary desires, psychotherapy clients are typically taught to strive towards static goals, which blunts present awareness of their own play. If clients learned to treat their own “real” lives more like fantasies—taught to hold desire, and hence reality, more lightly—the aesthetic distance created would allow them to make light of their situations, and allow for more adaptability.

With my blurred relationship to reality and fantasy, I see therapy as drama, and drama as therapy. Although I have compassion for the individual self that comes in confused with its relationship to the Oneness—the intrepid human soul which wants love but cannot see how it can find this (believing as most do that it comes

from *without*)—I have to see through this heavy fog to the dramatic artifice that bedevils them. For example, when my clients begin their stories, their crying, their anger, I think of what wonderful actors they are! If only I could expand the stage of the dramatic situation so that they could see this perspective too. But my perspective comes from experience, and I cannot transfer this filter directly except through the processes of learning. Previously, I would offer my clients a larger venue to really get into their rage or despair (such as a bigger room or theatre space). The problem was, in this bigger space, they all shut down. They were fully prepared for my confined office, wherein they could get a bit angry, pout, and intellectualize—but a theatre space? A bigger and dramatic space evoked this sense in my clients:

CLIENT

This is bizarre. It's too big. I feel my body. What do I do in such a big space? My body is at a loss. Give me a small room with a dim light. Please... This is not how therapy "looks". I should be in a small office with you. My shit is real! It isn't fantasy. It isn't theatre. Don't take me into this big room and have me pretend to be my mother! I can't be my mother. I can only talk about her in the small room. I want to play the scene the way that I want to play it.

And if therapy is drama, then drama is therapy. I observe actors yelling at each other, and then pretending that they do not *really* mean it: "I was just acting." These moments of being phoney (ironically and usually just after acting when they were being more "real") are perfectly teachable moments; although, these moments are not exposed in traditional drama classes, they are in my class and in dramatherapy. Professional drama classes do not discuss these issues because

interpersonal conflicts and therapeutic concerns are not their mandate. If a personal issue occurs between actors, the director informs them to keep personal issues off-stage (and get back to work!). Drama classes' mandate is to make money off of preparing actors for the stage or screen. In my drama class though, our mandate is that actors will learn about themselves, especially through interpersonal conflicts. I invite my actors to examine how their behaviours translate into the real world, and about how interpersonal conflicts are affecting their fantastical scenes.

In the end, in my effort to delineate a better therapeutic practice, I would combine the depth work of psychoanalysis and existential therapy, Gestalt's present-focused awareness and experimental creativity, Buddhist meditational practices, somatic psychology's body work, sex therapy's focus on the orgasmic/lustful creature within us all, and give every client a course on philosophy in a weekly extensive group therapy session that combines dance, movement, and art therapies. (I never said my desires were small.) With all of this included and synthesized, I believe I would have something close to what I am creating in my drama class.

Conclusion

The snarl of nomenclature

Any research into dramatic or therapeutic fields must tangle first with nomenclature. During this research, I have realized that there is no particular dramaturgical, drama-therapeutic, or psychotherapeutic orientation that my work fits into. (Perhaps it is overly ambitious?) My work, with its therapeutic extension, focus on process, and volunteer/non-commercial basis, is a unique crossover. The name of this group and its facilitator's title going forward will be a crucial ethical consideration: one must give participants an understanding of what they are getting into, and what is expected. The name that I created to signify myself—an "autocatalyst"—is still in working form and may change further to incorporate more of a drama-oriented angle to it. However, the idea of encouraging participants' Wills through activating and identifying desire is strongly intact.

How do my different selves interact with my embedded environments?

My self changes depending on my environment. When I am in a therapeutic environment, I am much more behaviourally restrained than in a dramatic one. In therapy, I stiffen and compress: in acting, I relax and decompress. Therapy's tiny offices—packed with chairs, desks, and humans—also feel more claustrophobic and cognitively oriented than the drama world's larger rooms and spaces that allow my body to move. Therapy, with its accompanying hushed waiting rooms, also feel more emotionally constraining than drama halls where the sounds of unabashed screaming, moaning, and other animalistic noises are often surprising (and

strangely inviting). In the actual dramatic environment, I feel that any vocal, emotional, or bodily dynamic range is accepted: I can explode, run, yell, fall to the floor, or be quiet. Therapeutic environments, on the other hand, have a very limited range; in these quiet zones, I am made to withdraw, think, sit up straight, and be mostly “appropriate”.

Being with clients in the therapy room as a therapist, I feel like an observer in a bad play—a play where the actor has said their lines so much, they have become sick of hearing them. I also do not feel as if I have contact with clients: they are in their own world, and I, relegated to a rather bored audience, am in mine. In drama and in drama therapy, and although I am a facilitator/observer like in therapy, I must interact with participants. In these realms, I can stand, crouch, roll on the floor, and still physically and mentally touch individuals to be in their world (and surprisingly, the world does end as some therapists suggest).

Potential interpersonal, social, or cultural impacts apparent on the participants in these respective domains

Interpersonally, I find that drama and drama therapy participants are more relaxed and open than therapeutic clients. Second, unlike the controlled environment of a group therapy session, there is much more interaction going on between participants, and between participants and the facilitators/directors in drama and drama therapy. Third, friendships that develop in drama and drama therapy are not frowned upon as they are in psychotherapy.

Socially, drama participants share an interest in drama, but usually do not self-identify with mental health issues. Drama therapy participants generally do not have much contact with dramatic processes and teaching, and are frequently confined to institutional settings like prisons or mental health wards. Therapeutic clients may or may not be interested in professional drama, but they sure like to bring drama to the therapy room!

Culturally, drama and drama therapy bring an individualistic cultural skew to participants. While rare to find other ethnicities in traditional drama classes, drama therapy has a wider range of ethnicities, whereas psychotherapy's participants and therapists are becoming increasingly multi-cultural. Drama and drama therapy are very stilted towards a Caucasian and individualistic audience in their promotion of the self, role, and their disconnections from the collective whole.

Typically, drama's anxiety-producing nature is more evident in ethnic and/or foreign-born participants. I recall that one of my members in my drama class left because, in her culture, swearing and yelling were considered rude (whether or not she was in a role or not); her husband forbade her from returning, and we never saw her again. In another instance, I was doing some drama therapy work with a group of Iraqis and Japanese students: the Iraqi men had a hard time looking in each other's eyes, saying that in their culture this is a sign you want to fight, while the Japanese students could only summon only the weakest yell when I asked them to lift their speech's volume. They told me, "That's all we can do. It's too much to ask for more."

Meanings that relate to my continued participation in these programmes

I love working in psychotherapy. I enjoy connecting with others on a deeper level—that’s *my stuff* (although I call it being human)—and I continue to try incorporating dramatic extensions into my therapeutic work. Likewise, I love drama and drama therapy too. I will continue to use my therapeutic skills as therapeutic extensions to foster a community of learning through dramatic processes. All three systems have incredible value. They just need to realize each other’s strengths, learn from each other, and come together more.

Significance of this research

This research is important because it highlights the contributions of drama, drama therapy, and psychotherapy to each other—as well as their divisions. For example, therapy would do well to examine the physical spaces in which it conducts itself, with the understanding that the set is just as important to the scene as the dialogues within. Similarly, drama practitioners, with their penchant for doing extremely dangerous psychological work on unsuspecting aspiring actors, could benefit from psychotherapy’s insistence on basic ethical considerations—specifically, *to do no harm*. Drama therapy could try to elucidate its differences with drama better, while offering a more compelling reason that it should not be considered part of psychology.

This research also calls into question the validity of commercial therapeutic “caring” as a whole. Once payment is introduced, the transactional nature of enterprises and institutions is directly at odds with the spirit of caring and sacrifice.

This also brings into question whether professional therapy can truly handle spiritual or faith-based issues at all.

Strengths and limitations of this research

This research was limited by its enormous and introductory scope. There were so many ideas and topics involved; I could only get at some of their most general impressions. Although, this scope was also one of its strengths: it allowed me to delve into the larger issues surrounding psychotherapy, drama, and dramatherapy without being constrained by the usual scientific requisite to keep topics limited.

The existing nomenclature of psychotherapy, drama therapy, and drama was also a limitation of this research: there are so many schools and orientations of thought between the three of these, that it was particularly difficult to be general about any of them without constantly stating exclusions.

Lastly, this research was also limited by the size of participant sample; to be more generalizable next time, I suggest a larger size. This factor is also a strength—by having fewer participants, it was much easier to cull the data and interviews into a workable form, as well as highlight individuals in the final play so that composite personalities and interactions could more easily be written.

Potential applications of findings

As this research questions commercial psychotherapy as the basis of a large portion of our mental health services, perhaps volunteer and trained counsellors would be better. In particular, I was thinking about the legions of seniors coming

into retirement who are looking for work to do. These seniors, with their lifetime of experience, might be particularly valuable for the wisdom they could offer back to the community in therapeutic settings. I envision seniors running drama and drama therapy classes for young to senior adults, where there is a therapeutic and ethical standard in place to encourage community involvement, growth, and change. Not only would this encourage seniors to become more active, it would reinstate them back into their old, community position as *wise elders*—not the “waiting to die’s” that we find in many senior community clinics and centres around the country.

Future research directions

Future research could be done on this subject in many ways. First, considering my small sample was done with just seniors, it would be wise to study younger actors who might also be interested in a therapeutic extension appended to in their work. Second, I suggest adding in quantitative measures to any future studies—although autoethnographies are fun, sexy, and deliver rich data, it is numbers that government funding bodies are really interested in; and, if this research was done on seniors again, I would suggest using the World Health Organization’s Quality of Life scale (“WHO | WHO Quality of Life-BREF (WHOQOL-BREF),” n.d.). Third, I would suggest running a drama class with a therapeutic extension and one without, and then measure differences between the groups. Finally, I would be more specific next time and choose particular strains of drama, drama therapy, and psychotherapy to compare and contrast with each other.

“Acting is a way of practicing compassion—because you learn that everybody is in some way loveable.”—Maggie Gyllenhaal

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