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There is a Crack in Everything ... Mind The Gap

Theatre of Becoming: An Heuristic Inquiry into the Process of Becoming a
Dramatherapist

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A Research Paper

in

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Abstract

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Theatre of Becoming : An Heuristic Inquiry into the Process of Becoming a
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Samantha May

This paper is a heuristic study, exploring the process of becoming a dramatherapist. It proposes self-revelatory performance as both the heuristic research tool and the container for the findings of the study. The paper chronicles the entire research process as well as the performance piece. The author argues for the importance of self-reflective practices such as this in the training process of dramatherapists. It covers the effect of this research process and gives implications for the practice and training of dramatherapists.

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Introduction

Subject Area

This paper explores the experience of becoming a dramatherapist; the process of becoming a dramatherapist. The aim of this study is to deepen the understanding of the various processes involved in this experience, in an attempt to shed light on what happens in a person as they move through such a journey. The main question that will be explored through this study, therefore, is the following: What is it to become a dramatherapist?

The process of becoming a dramatherapist is in itself a creative process, which involves the person on every level. A role is to be created and the person must be at ease with that role, knowing the boundaries, rights and responsibilities of that role. This process involves the person physically, emotionally, mentally and, indeed, spiritually, as the person creates and embodies this role. The process of creation and embodiment comes from within the person and involves intense questioning. This questioning necessarily implicates both a questioning of that which is external (What is dramatherapy? What is a dramatherapist? What is healing? etc.) as well as that which is internal (Where do I fit into the therapeutic framework? Can I be a dramatherapist? What does it take on a personal level to do this type of work? etc.).

This experience will be studied using a heuristic framework incorporating dramatic and creative research tools. Since this is such a personal experience

that is being investigated, I feel that the heuristic paradigm is the most potent container for this process. Indeed, Parker (1983) states that “the heuristic design is personally meaningful. Usually beginning with one's own experience, the calling of one's self to search within through reflection, inquiry and self-examination. The researcher's internal processes are awakened in the experience of inquiring” (pp.55-56).

After completing my training, I have felt a strong need to re-examine and explore exactly what it is that I have come through. As I stated before, this journey has been one of creative process and the heuristic paradigm marries itself well with the subjective experience of creative process. The particular methods that I have employed in this exploration will be covered in detail in the methods section of this paper.

Creativity is, for me, a search for meaning and the finding of form for this meaning. I have chosen to return to the medium of dramatherapy, both as the method to explore the experience, and as container for the research process. I engaged fully in a heuristic inquiry using drama processes to create a self-revelatory performance piece that explores the journey and findings of my study. Dramatherapy training has been an intense personal experience that provoked many questions and engaged every part of my being. This paper is therefore presented with a video component chronicling the performance¹.

¹ Anyone wanting information about a copy of the video should contact me at unperfumed@hotmail.com.

Outline

The work has been organized much in the way a dramatherapy session would be organized. During my training, I experienced various shifts in my understanding and experiencing of the medium and my role within the medium. I have chosen to adopt Sue Jennings (1990, 1994) EPR (Embodiment-Projection-Role) model to frame the experiences. I have chosen to divide the written work in the same way beginning with a review of the current literature on becoming a therapist followed by an explanation of heuristics, creative process and the dramatherapy methods I employed.

This will be followed by an explanation of the various stages of warm-up, embodiment, projection, role and closing as they relate to the inquiry process.

This will examine both the process I engaged in and the findings from the examination of those processes. I will then focus on the performance piece and expand upon my experience of creating and performing this piece as a container for my reflections. I will end with a summary and discussion of where this process has led me and what relevance this may have to the practice and training of dramatherapists.

The Field of Inquiry

Literature Review

It was surprising to me when I undertook this project to find how little literature has been produced on the actual process of becoming a therapist. I came across a number of books which documented challenges associated with being a therapist, such as Kottler (1986), or giving brief descriptive accounts of individuals journeys into being therapists such as Norcross and Guy (1988) and Dryden and Spurling (1988). Goldberg (1986) explores becoming a therapist in a similarly descriptive manner as does Guy (1987). I found that these accounts whilst they addressed the psychological and sociological factors involved, left me wanting to know more about what was stirred up internally in these people as they moved through this journey.

There was much literature available on the exertions of being a therapist although again they were personal in nature and did not exactly explore the "process of becoming" which is what is of most interest to me. These articles are pertinent to this project in that they show in some way what a complex and all-encompassing process being a therapist is. Sussman (1995) gives a good account of the personal development of therapists through their practice. Irwin (1986), a dramatherapist, gives an interesting exploration of being and becoming a therapist specifically a creative arts therapist. This paper was useful in that it is specifically concerned with the creative arts therapies training process and what is involved therein.

A qualitative study that was very useful in confirming the need for the work that I am doing was by Bennett-Levy, Turner, Smith, Paterson & Farmer (2001). The authors follow the process of postgraduate clinical psychology students whilst they practised self-practice and self-reflection techniques, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of the training process both by experiencing the medium within which they were working, and reflecting on the experience of the training program. The study found that through engaging in such self-reflective processes the trainees gained not only a deeper understanding of therapy but also of the therapist role, change processes and of themselves. The report also includes guidelines and recommendations for inclusion of such self-reflective practices in training courses.

An interesting article on supervision by Berger (1997) gives a good overview of recent literature that holds that the process of becoming a therapist is developmental in nature. Although, as I said, this article focuses mainly on supervision; however, it is useful, here, in reconfirming the developmental nature of this process. The research for this project was conducted using both creative and developmental models, so this article served to further confirm the structure of my investigation.

Research Methods

Heuristic Research

In this section I will break down the various characteristics of heuristic methodology and briefly explain what form they took in this study. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) define heuristic research as being a “search for the discovery of meaning and essence in a significant human experience.” They go on to explain that its aims are “to suggest a process that affirms imagination, intuition and self-reflection as valid ways on the search for knowledge and understanding” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p.41).

As is usual in heuristic research, I have no formally stated hypotheses but am openly reflecting upon a process in attempt to deepen an understanding of its meaning. The concern here is not limited to conscious, intellectual processes but engages with the tacit dimension (see Polyani, 1967). The research works from the inside out, beginning with an internal search of self, based in the experiencing of something. The experience being explored here is that of becoming a dramatherapist. This search is conducted through the medium of drama, using the reflective techniques of the practice of dramatherapy.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) note that, of the heuristic work done up until now the processes are “of a highly individual nature, each heuristic study is a unique, creative challenge aimed at revealing the intimate nature of reality and thus requiring methods that fit the particular investigation” (p.42). This is true for

this project as the findings are contained within the performance. It seemed to be the appropriate container for this process. As I stated earlier, this was an in-depth personal experience and the nuances of my reflections could not be fully explored or explained through a written form but required a different more holistic forum.

Heuristics is an emergent process, emic in nature, meaning that it emerges from within a person; as such, it is essentially subjective in nature. The experience of reflecting on this journey involved the emergence of several symbolic structures that were then incorporated into the performance piece. While it is personal and mostly autobiographical in nature, the process of becoming is universal. We are all involved in this process of becoming at some level, becoming a parent, a scholar, a professional etc. As always in heuristics, it is impossible to achieve objectivity, so this is not presented as a universal experience but rather offers a closer look at my own experience in the hope that insights for others might also be made available.

The heuristic research process involves various phases of inquiry, both passive and active inquiry, and the process unfolds itself in a spontaneous manner. The process is characterized by the fact that it “both precedes and encompasses the following series of critical concepts” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985, p.45).

These concepts are organized below into a four-phase model that is much in line with creative process theory. The research process alternated between phases

of active workshopping, therapy, journaling, etc. and phases of more passive witnessing of my experience in the moment and reflecting upon that experience.

The different phases are outlined below and are taken from Parker (1983), and I will illustrate how they apply to this study:

1. *Immersion*

This involves a process of immersing oneself fully in the problem or issue at hand. This happened quite naturally in this case since I was studying full time and ate, slept and breathed dramatherapy in an effort to grasp its essence and how that essence was to manifest itself through the development of the role of dramatherapist. Moustakas (1981) calls this a period of “indwelling”, through which the researcher can then be open and available to the subtleties of the experience which are available. The researcher relies on their internal frame of reference to draw from the experience and searches within the self to see how this experience is being assimilated.

2. *Incubation*

This is a period whereby the problem settles and is not so much a conscious line of questioning but remains in the tacit dimension where different parts of the experience filter down and fit together in a natural way. This was a process of digestion where the other aspects of my life, -- that of being a mother and being required to function outside of my research question-- took the focus. My

conscious mind was distracted from the investigation and the questions that were turning in my mind returned to the pot periodically to be mulled over and be transformed into understandings in the next phase.

3. Illumination

This is a period described by Parker (1983) as being “the breakthrough of knowledge, seeing the light of knowledge from the darkness of the unknown” (p.64). For me this came in the form of certain symbolic structures that appeared in my writing and workshopping. They came in the form of metaphors for example which captured precisely the nuances of the experience. As Moustakas (1961) outlines, the researcher uses intuition and there is a flow between the phases of research as the knowledge comes forth within the person.

4. Explication

Next comes the phase of finding a way of conveying this knowledge; a process of refinement of the key elements of the experience. For me this entailed playing with the symbols that had emerged and looking for a coherent way in which to present them so that they could be communicated. It meant coming back to the essential questions that I was trying to explore and comparing them with what had emerged. There is a flux inherent in heuristic research between staying within the subjective world, emerging oneself in and absorbing the experience, and returning to the outside world in an attempt to verify and, then, communicate the findings.

5. Creative synthesis

Parker describes this as the “clarification, integration and conceptualization of findings which evolve from the exploration in the immersion and explication phases” (p.65). This process involved exploring the meaning of these symbolic representations further to bring them to a place where they could be aesthetically represented. In fact, this was a long process of creation and testing of symbols in the aesthetic form. It entailed me narrowing down and focussing on exactly what it was that I wanted to represent and how I could represent it in a way that would be neither too reductive nor too self-indulgent, whilst staying true to my real experience. In essence, this stage entailed creating a theatrical forum where the insight I obtained could be communicated.

Creative Process

As I stated earlier in the text, I feel strongly that this research was born from a natural curiosity about the training process that I have been engaged in. A deeper understanding of that process seemed essential to me and to my work as a therapist. It would seem that both the process of becoming a therapist and, indeed, the reflection of that process are creative processes. It seems relevant, here, therefore, to look at creative process as it is pertains to this project.

Rollo May explains creative process very nicely, stating that it “involves the total person, with the subconscious and unconscious acting in unity with the

conscious. It is not, thus irrational; it is rather supra-rational. It brings the intellectual, volitional and emotional functions into play together” (May, 1994, p. 49). We can see through Rosemary Gordon's (1975) outline of the four stages of creative process that they mirror quite well the stages of research outlined above:

1. *Preparation*

“which is the time when a person immerses himself in a problem and feels himself drawn into a period of conscious concern and struggle” (p. 6).

2. *Incubation*

which “depends on a person’s capacity to relinquish the normal compulsion to differentiate sharply; instead he can allow himself to scatter his attention and to let boundaries dissolve” (p. 6).

3. *Illumination*

“There is a sudden flash of light, an inspiration, a happy idea occurs to him.” It “tends to be unexpected, sudden and often marked by a feeling of certitude. In this phase exuberance and ecstasy are often experienced” (p. 6).

4. *Verification*

It “is a sort of ‘coming-down-to-earth’ stage; a period of critical testing, when the ideas received in the period of inspiration are tested, organized and given relevant and appropriate form and expression” (pp.6-7).

Through this list we can see how heuristic research is essentially a creative process (see Appendix A). Indeed, this exploration began as I began the program and culminated in the creation of the performance piece. I was unaware of the process at the beginning, it came naturally as a result of the exercises I engaged in as part of the training program and, when it became a conscious idea to formally engage in a heuristic study, various dramatherapy methods were employed.

Dramatherapy Methods

As I explained, the research process was born through my experience of the program and was very much stimulated by the various dramatherapy exercises that I was involved in during my time in the program. It is difficult to directly distinguish which methods or exercises brought about each understanding; the entire training process provoked a questioning and in some way each exercise moved that questioning in its own direction. For the purposes of this paper, I restrict this list to those methods I directly used for the creation of the performance piece. I will list the various techniques along with references for the reader to explore:

- ❖ As explained briefly above, I used Jennings (1990, 1994) EPR embodiment projection role paradigm.

- ❖ Robert Landy's work with role, counter-role and guide – see Landy (1993, 1994).
- ❖ I used various psychodramatic techniques such as the empty chair and role reversal – see Blatner (1996).
- ❖ I also introduced David Read Johnson's (1991) Developmental Transformations, especially the concepts of "the playspace" and "witness", and in this case, my director and the audience itself.
- ❖ Finally I used the projective technique of face painting explicated by Barbara Mackay (1987).

Self-Revelatory Performance

Self-revelatory performance as explained by Renee Emunah (1994) is the transformation of personal material into a theatrical creation. It is usually a combination of structured theatre with improvised components. In this case all of the dialogue was improvised and a structure was created through workshopping, journaling etc. The process of creation of the performance was, in itself, a heuristic therapeutic study and the piece contained the findings in a form that is both symbolic and realistic. In short, I am proposing that the creation of a self-revelatory performance is a form of heuristic study.

As is usual with self-revelatory performance the issues dealt with in the piece were current issues; here, they were issues surrounding what is involved in becoming a dramatherapist. Self-revelatory theatre as Emunah explains builds

on the work of Grotowski and Artaud exploring the healing potential in theatre and the relationship between audience and actor as the actors play themselves. So the traditional boundaries between actor and role and actor and audience are modified.

Grotowski (1968) has some inspirational words which are pertinent to the amount of vulnerability and honesty that are required to create and perform such "real" theatre; talking of the work of the actor "one must give oneself totally in one's deepest intimacy, with confidence, as when one gives oneself in love" (p.38). It is precisely this type of honesty that is required in self-revelatory performance as I explored the reality of becoming a therapist through the symbolic structure of theatre and, then, offered up the results to be witnessed by the audience.

Arthur Robbins (1988), puts it succinctly, stating "communication is a key word here for a completed work of any medium becomes art only when it touches us as a living truth...When symbolic form includes multiple levels of communication and transcends its individual parts to communicate a larger meaning, it approaches the level of aesthetic communication" (p.95). We can see then, that the creation of self-revelatory theatre is more than just theatre but is a vehicle not only of exploration but one of communication and one which can be therapeutic both to actor and audience as a dilemma or a reality is symbolically expressed and shared. There is a deep sharing that takes place in this type of theatre and a tremendous amount of vulnerability asked of the player who entrusts the

audience with an intimate knowledge. The creation and performance of the self-revelatory piece serves both as research and dissemination of the findings of research process.

Ciona (2001) gives a complete and detailed exploration of self-revelatory performance, its effects and uses; her paper contains a reference list with many authors writing on self-revelatory performance. Many of the references discuss personal insights that emerged through the creation and performance of self-revelatory performance. I have not, however, found anything which directly advocates or suggests self-revelatory performance as formal research, heuristic or otherwise.

The Journey

As explained earlier, the research process resulted in the emergence of various symbolic structures that were put into the performance piece. This section of the paper consists of a brief explanation of some of those structures and how they fit into the theatrical form. Many different experiences came together within me to form an understanding of what I was experiencing.

There is a strong theoretical component to dramatherapy training with many diverse theories, some conflicting, and part of becoming a dramatherapist is discerning which theory is appropriate to which type of practice. This section will also shed light on how various theories were assimilated and joined with my own personal experience to create both the role of therapist and an understanding of what dramatherapy is to me.

In an attempt to organize these ideas, I have chosen to adopt Jennings (1990, 1994) EPR model to break up the different phases of the journey to becoming a dramatherapist. It seemed to me, right from the beginning, that becoming a therapist was a developmental process and the more that I became familiar with Jennings developmental paradigm of dramatic development the more that this paradigm seemed to match my experience. The paradigm consists of three main phases embodiment, projection and role, preceded by a warm up and ending with a closing or de-roling.

Warm-up

This is the time in a typical dramatherapy session when the client slowly leaves the outside world behind and begins to warm up physically, mentally and emotionally to enter the dramatic reality. With respect to my personal process, the warm up was the time preceding my entrance into the program where all of the experiences with the creative arts, especially the dramatic arts, effected me in such a way as to make me feel like approaching this career path. In the performance piece, this was the time when I left the hubbub of daily life and all of its demands and embarked upon the journey - here represented by a train journey to "Becoming". It was a time marked by great uncertainty as to what exactly the nature of dramatherapy was and what my work would be.

Embodiment – state of fusion- body oriented - colour blue²

In dramatherapy the embodiment phase of play is one of exploration of the immediate sensory world (Cattanach, 1994). It is the kind of play that young babies engage in when there is no clear division about where their self-ends and where the substance of play begins.

In developing my piece, the metaphor of "the gap" appears for the first time; this gap is the space between the idea of what dramatherapy is and the reality of the training process. If we look at my development of becoming a dramatherapist,

² These colours came through the workshopping and were used to decorate the set as I passed through the various phases. The primary colours were used to represent these elemental phases of dramatic development.

this was a period where I felt totally submerged in dramatherapy. It was a very intense time where I felt almost underwater, absorbed by the ideas I was trying to negotiate accept, reject and finally assimilate. I represented this in the piece by me eating theory while surrounded by a space thick with sounds, echoes of snatches of theory. It was a time with no clear boundaries of where dramatherapy began and ended. My existence seemed to fuse with what I was living as I steeped my self in the subject matter, physically. Everything I saw and did, even my mothering, seemed linked with dramatherapy. This continued until finally links began to form and order emerged from the chaos and my own understanding of dramatherapy emerged.

At this time, everything I read combined with my experience and seemed to fit together like pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle. In the piece, I used the metaphor of surfacing from the ocean and climbing on to a surfboard, slightly unsteady, but managing to balance and ride on this new found illumination.

This time was one of exhilaration for me, the knowledge felt like my own and had the feeling of something that I had uncovered that I had known all along. It is difficult to eloquently express what was going on, but it was a feeling of truth that came out of me rising to the surface combining many aspects of my experience. In hindsight, this feeling of in some way making the theory my own was of great importance to my practice. I can only work with what I feel completely comfortable with and I feel that clients can only feel safe enough to explore their

world with me if they perceive a sense of solidity with the way I understand and use the creative tools and techniques. This solidity grew over time after the initial period of illumination and is constantly being added to with experience with techniques and further reading. It was at this stage that my personal way of defining dramatherapy came about: drama being the “art of becoming” and therapy being concerned with our state of being...so dramatherapy is using the techniques and tools in the art of becoming to discover more about our present state of being and our current stage of becoming.

As I mentioned, it was imperative to me that I embody the knowledge; that it be a part of me, that I could believe in it. Interestingly, as explored briefly in the play there were many parallels between dramatherapy theory and my spiritual beliefs that were formed during this time. This was exhilarating in that the final element, that is the fourth dimension the spiritual, was put together. In dramatherapy we often explore the bio-psycho-social aspects of a situation and the joining of that with my Buddhist beliefs added a practical spiritual aspect to the learning which added to the feeling of rightness.

Projection – state of separation – emotional – colour red

In dramatherapy, this stage is characterized by the development of the transitional object; the object that is both “me” and “not me”(Winnicott, 1958). Piaget (1962) describes this phase as a time when an area is made available for the child “whose motive is not adaptation to reality but assimilation, of reality to

the self without coercion or sanctions. Such an area is play, which transforms reality by assimilation to the needs of the self" (Cattanach, 1994, p.30).

For my process this was a phase of sifting of ideas about what a therapist is and a creative time where I played with the idea of the role of therapist. The various theories were sorted, some rejected, some adopted and others assimilated, all of this mixed with my own personal belief system. I had to delineate the boundaries of the role and look at emotional and dramatic distance. I was particularly concerned with distance and how close to get to a client; about how to stay connected with a client without being in some way sucked into their situation. In many ways it was a quest for a professional identity and an understanding of the boundaries of that professional identity. This was represented in the performance piece by me trying on extreme projections of what a dramatherapist could be. In essence this part of the play was about establishing my orientation as a therapist. This was the time of taking the step from theory to exploring how this knowledge could be shared and what role I was to play within that.

This questioning and, indeed, its results provoked a personal crisis of sorts - I felt unsure that I was up to the task. I was uncomfortable about playing behind a projection of what a therapist is and unsure of how to actually become a therapist. As in the piece, I rejected the idea of trying on a costume of a therapist; of putting on a front or walking into a mould of a dramatherapist. The faculty strongly encouraged us to make dramatherapy our own, to really embark

upon a self-exploration to become aware of our attitudes, to ask ourselves questions in order for us to become aware of our frame of reference. This is something that was very important to me: to become conscious of attitudes related to healing and therapy and the client-therapist relationship. I felt that I had to be genuine in being a therapist. I knew that I would be sitting with clients at their most vulnerable and that if I felt that I was just acting, pulling exciting techniques from my bag of tricks, that I would not be able to live this and feel comfortable.

I represented this crisis in the play using Landy's (1993, 1994) role, counter-role guide paradigm. Using the projective technique of face painting and the therapist-to-be as the main role. I created a character named ***The Shadow*** who then represented all of the doubt and questioning contained within the main role. The role of ***The Shadow***, angry and wild, ranted at the central character pointing out all of the faults and reasons why she could never be a good enough therapist. She was the embodiment of fear, judgement and all that the character was afraid of. She explained to the character that she had a "crack", that she was imperfect, faulted, unacceptable and, as such, could not make it. Furthermore, as the main character rejected her, she explained that all rejection was futile since this shadow resided within her and that all of the clients would make ***The Shadow*** come out.

Out of this crisis, emerged ***The Guide***, the voice that had lead me to this career path and believed in my abilities. She encouraged the main character to accept her insecurities, to trust herself and to be gentle and compassionate towards herself, and to allow this way of being to be at the root of her practice.

There were many questions raised in this phase and the metaphor of “the crack” emerged as being that which is vulnerable, “the fault” in each human being. This crack became the central metaphor of the piece, indeed, of the journey and ultimately the title of the piece “ There is a crack in everything...Mind the gap”. It was during this phase that I was questioning in detail the idea of healing and being healed and my reticence in accepting a position of one who is wounded (or in the continual process of healing), providing a healing of sorts. The role of ***Chiron*** came out of this projection as being a mythical figure, typically, a wounded healer, who engaged the creative arts for healing purposes. ***Chiron*** then was brought to life in the next phase.

Role – State of individuation – mental – colour yellow

In dramatherapy this phase of dramatic play is characterized by the taking on of roles both of self and other to represent something through the creation and embodiment of a role. This was the phase of the practical application of all of the soul-searching, the “minding of the gap”, if you will, between the theoretical and the practical. This was a phase of concretely working with clients and finding my own voice within the practice. This was naturally interspersed with a whole

series of questions that appear in the piece about how to practically hold the play space, self-care, therapeutic evaluation etc. It was a time of fully embodying the role of **Chiron** and being a therapist, of accepting the seemingly endless process of processing my own experience of the therapeutic relationship.

This is the part of the process that continues to evolve. Each session that I give, like water to a flower, nourishes that role, firming up ways of being and nuances inherent in this role. In the play, I represented this phase by giving a first session with a new client, spending time to introduce dramatherapy, my role within that and my theoretical orientation. I strongly feel that each therapy session, like a chemical reaction leaves both parties changed. The core stays the same but the client seems to draw different ways of working from each. Each client is a new challenge in the sense that I wish to present the material to them in the way that is going to be most beneficial to them, leaving them feeling that they have come closer to understanding themselves through the use of their own creativity.

Again, it was important for me to show that this was an ever-evolving process, each encounter building on the last, with each individual co-creating the nature and path of the therapeutic relationship.

Closing/ De-roling

In dramatherapy, this is typically the time when the client is brought back from the dramatic reality, a time for reflection upon the play and absorption of the

dramatic process. It is a grounding time when the dramatic reality is replaced by the clients' reality and the session ends.

This was the process of coming back to myself, of getting perspective of my learning and finding a place for the role of therapist amongst the other roles that make up my existence. I symbolized this in the play by returning home, where the piece had begun, and by folding all of the roles that I had played in the piece into a suitcase. I then stepped forward as the "real " me, the person behind all of the roles, yet carrying them; all of them being constantly available. It is clear in the piece and in my being that this journey is not over; the EPR way of exploring my reality and learning and modifying my role system is constantly being revised and part of the closing is an acknowledgement of that eternal process of becoming.

The Performance Piece

In this section I will discuss the creation of the performance piece as well as its execution. I will end this section with a brief discussion of how this experience affected me.

Creation

The performance was born from a collection of symbols and images that emerged from my reflection on my experience in the program and in my internship. It came fluidly and naturally and felt to me to be a necessary closing to my experience. I was followed, throughout the whole experience, by my own therapist (as recommended by the faculty). Although the project did not often directly enter the therapy sessions, it was considered important to have the support available if necessary.

Once I had a clear idea of the structure of the piece, I began to work with a director, Pierre-Charles Millette, who had not only extensive theatre experience, but was also a colleague in the dramatherapy training process. This was very important to me so that I would not lose sight of the essence of what I was trying to portray in favour of aesthetics. There is always a delicate balance that needs to be maintained in self-revelatory performance between aesthetics and staying true to the experience of the actor. Emunah (1994) argues that emphasis on aesthetics intensifies the therapeutic process. I would agree with this: the idea of performance necessarily encourages one to focus on the bare bones of the

experience leaving that which is superfluous. There is naturally a process of breaking down and examining the various themes during which further insight is achieved. We began to workshop the piece once a week for a period of a few months until the piece was aesthetically presentable. Pierre-Charles played a role which, in dramatherapy, is typically played by the therapist. He “held” the playspace, meaning that he was witness to my process and helped to lend some objectivity to the aesthetic form. I would present him with my ideas and, then, I would experiment with various forms on stage. We would then try and find something that could be aesthetically represented and stay true to the meaning I was trying to convey.

As is common in self-revelatory performance I created a pre-established structure to the performance as well as a timed soundtrack that I produced, independently, with the help of a sound technician. The content was then improvised within this structure, there was no scripted monologue but a series of cues that would enable the sound to keep up with the action. The reason for the improvised nature was to allow the space for spontaneity and to allow me to feel free to stay completely in the moment of my experience of becoming a therapist whilst on stage. Indeed, there were monologues that I had struggled with improvising, especially for *The Guide*, which were born out of the audience connection, appearing in the thrall of the performance and completing the process for me.

Performance

The piece was performed twice, once for friends and family and the other time for faculty, dramatherapy students from all years and other professionals with whom I had worked or for whom I felt this might be an interesting experience.

There were a number of factors that were imperative to the piece:

- ❖ That the piece stay as close as possible to the real experience of becoming a dramatherapist.
- ❖ That the developmental nature of becoming be exposed.
- ❖ That the piece express my voyage from the discovery of dramatherapy to my personal understanding of dramatherapy as well as my way of working as a dramatherapist. It was important to me that my personal belief system be exposed and questioned, as it was during the training.
- ❖ That the piece be accessible to both dramatherapists and people with no knowledge of the field and, as such, that the piece serve as an introduction to dramatherapy theory, methods and practice.
- ❖ That the piece be aesthetically feasible and interesting.
- ❖ That the piece show the process of becoming as never-ending.
- ❖ That the structure of the piece allow for spur of the moment adjustments and creative development on stage as well as to allow for audience reaction.

I had organized the play structure as outlined above to go through all of the stages of embodiment projection and role (EPR). This added another dimension

to the play, as I wanted the play to be accessible and not just to people who study dramatherapy. I felt strongly that I was representing a personal human experience, one which I feel many people undergo, in different forms, as they “become” whatever they choose³. As mentioned earlier, there were many dramatherapy techniques illustrated in the piece, aside from this the play lasted approximately the length of a session and took the audience through all of the stages of EPR, from warm up to closing/derolling.

It was important that this remain a dynamic piece that would be able to allow me as actor to reflect openly during the piece and change the monologue as I was inspired. There is a strong audience component in self-revelatory theatre, so I also wanted to keep the structure loose to allow for the witnessing to feedback into the performance. A panel of students from each of the five years of the program (1997-2001) had been arranged, after the second performance to give feedback and discuss the process of the dramatherapy training after the second performance. This was a delightful experience as it enabled the audience to complete the cycle and to be acknowledged in their role of witness. A space was also made available in the foyer of the theatre for written or artistic reflection, as the audience preferred. In the program I had outlined the importance of the audience, as witness, in that they made up the fourth wall and held the space much in the way that a therapist might hold the playspace for a client.

³ This is one reason why the subtitle of the play was Theatre of Becoming.

Playing myself and re-living the different stages of the journey was a very moving experience. It felt very live, very real, as I rapidly passed through a gamut of emotions from frustration and despair to exhilaration to the point of ecstasy and back again. The witnessing felt exceptionally powerful to me, the air felt charged and each moment was thick with the presence. There was a feeling of inviting people into my head and in some way there was a liberation in so doing.

It was a very surreal experience in that the line between actor and role are very interesting. One plays oneself and it is interesting to be seated in the "me/not me" paradox of role to such a degree. I felt as if I was in a hall of mirrors in a fun house, seeing myself and being seen in new ways. This was both a literal and metaphorical experience, given that the set contained three mirrors placed above three chairs. This culminated in the end of the play: when I had deroled in the closing, I removed the make up and, as I sat and folded the roles that I had played, the line between role and me, already paper thin, dissolved as I folded the final role of actor. When I stood up and took a bow as myself, roles by my side, I felt stark naked and completely disarmed, the applause and sharing that followed was like a rain of acceptance and validation of all that I had shared. It was a magical moment of clarity for me. I saw the whole process laid out in front of me and, in some way, for the first time I had been able to lay it out clearly, wholly and I felt very much at peace.

Aftershock

The effect of the performance was multifaceted. I felt that its creation had helped me gain insight into what I had just experienced and having that so well received and validated by the audience members and the panel was overwhelmingly positive for me. As I mentioned earlier, I had always felt somewhat uncomfortable with the hierarchy often present in therapeutic relationships and I felt completely unwilling to take a role of expert vis-à-vis the contents of another person's psyche. The play helped me be sure of my perspective on my role as therapist, as a compassionate facilitator in the 'theatre of becoming' of my clients.

The metaphor of "the crack" was well received and many audience members made reference to the relief of being able to admit vulnerability: that as a therapist one is not perfect and that contrary to how it may seem, accepting and acknowledging one's imperfections or vulnerabilities enables us to become more human, if not better therapists. The response of non-dramatherapists was very rewarding in that a number of people made reference to the fact that they had seen their own processes as artist, as business people etc. mirrored in the piece. For me, this serves to validate the universality of dramatherapy and reinforces my belief that the cycle of EPR is something that we are all engaged in life as we evolve or "become".

The creation of ***The Guide*** was probably the most challenging aspect of this performance piece. I struggled with this role. Perhaps this was one of the

reasons that I needed to do this piece. When I came to create *The Guide* she seemed so soft spoken that I could not hear her; her strength took such a gentle form that it was difficult to determine exactly how to portray her. Part of this is, no doubt, a representation of my own way of being and the difficulty I sometimes experience in listening to that small voice inside that tells me to be good to myself and to accept and respect my own limits. In a way the process of becoming a therapist worked very much on this role of *The Guide* and the final part of that was the creation of this role for myself. In a sense, to become my own therapist, my own guide and to accord myself that which I deem important for my clients was the challenge for me. Without this creation, I would be more like the old saying "do as I say not as I do," something which cannot be therapeutically effective. I had to learn to be at peace with myself and to listen to this *Guide* and to practice compassion for those places that *The Shadow* had so bluntly revealed.

This experience has increased my understanding of dramatherapy techniques and practice through personally experimenting with the techniques and the response of the audience reaffirmed both my professional and personal choices with respect to dramatherapy. In short this was a highly useful and indeed therapeutic experience for me. As with any such multifaceted experience, there are nuances that are only appearing after the fact; the piece is still working inside of me and I am sure that it will continue to do so for some time to come. My own process of becoming continues as I pass through my own creative process.

Christine Novy, a professor during my training, said once of dramatherapists, something to the effect, that to become a dramatherapist was to commit oneself to a lifetime of processing. This piece was my processing of all that I had lived during training and has helped me to better use my creativity to process what may be going on. Its creation encouraged me to explore my **Shadow** and understand what may be going on beneath a therapeutic encounter as well as to question and unravel my reactions to things and to listen and understand my **Guide**. Not forgetting to have compassion for the crack within myself and in my clients.

Summary / Discussion

Overview

Overall, I feel that this was a successful experience. The dramatic container of self-revelatory performance married itself well with the heuristic paradigm and became a powerful medium for personal reflection and the exposition of that reflection. The performance also opened an interesting and worthwhile discussion about the training and process of becoming a dramatherapist.

Personal Insights

This has been a profound and immensely rewarding experience for me. I feel that through this process I have gained not only a greater understanding of my training process and of dramatherapy but also of myself. The performance piece encouraged me to be vulnerable and to be comfortable with that vulnerability.

During the creation of the piece, I was reminded of an author Kay Redfield Jamison, noted by Ruth Behar (1996), as having been wary of the consequences of writing her book which chronicled her history of manic depression. She is a professor of psychiatry and as such put herself in an interesting position of a “wounded healer”, by exposing her illness. Behar (1996) states:

“Like other scholars stretching the limits of objectivity, she realises there are risks in exposing oneself in an academy that continues to feel ambivalent about observers who forsake the mantle of omniscience” (p.12).

Although I do not struggle with a diagnosable mental illness, I recently saw a card which summed it up for me, it read "the only normal people are the ones you don't know very well" --Joe Ancis. So inviting many people to know me better, warts, worries and all, put me in a vulnerable position, one that was finally very empowering. I feel that as a therapist I ask my clients to come as they are, to be, at ease with their stories and to openly explore their reality with me. I feel that the creation of this piece allowed me to do the same and to share that process with others and to forsake the mantle of "omnipotent therapist." It was tremendously challenging for me to perform such a personal piece in front of faculty peers etc., but, in so doing, I feel that I have formed my professional voice and am looking forward to seeing how that will evolve over time. The feedback that I received following the performance affirmed the importance of that process for me. The deconstruction of the role of therapist and the questioning of the formation of that role has permitted me to redefine "dramatherapist" in my own terms and to be completely comfortable with taking that role on. As in the play, I no longer swallow the word "dramatherapist", but clearly enunciate it, confident in its meaning and in what it entails and now able to explain it to others.

Implications for practice and training

Dramatherapy training is not about learning a series of techniques and repeating them with other people. It is much more complex than that. As dramatherapists, we deal on a very personal level with people from all walks of life and are privileged to witness, directly, innumerable life scenarios. The process of

becoming a therapist should prepare us to be able to appropriately treat many different types of situations. We talk about self-care and boundaries etc., but there must be an internal reflective process, that cannot be provided by an institution that must take place in order for us to “become” dramatherapists. We are in the business of creatively exploring peoples’ realities; creatively exploring our own is the first step to becoming a therapist. A heuristic study, such as this, obliges the researcher to delve into themselves and search for information; it necessarily includes self-reflection by its very definition; and it asks that we look within in a creative way to see how the process has and is effecting us.

As mentioned in the literature review section of this paper, there are studies that have shown that self-practice and self-reflective practices can enhance the development and understanding of therapists-in-training. I feel that this experience and the strength of understanding that it has left me with could serve as a model for dramatherapists-in-training. Spending time to reflect on the effects of the training is important: many of the exercises we learn move us and they should move us; it is important to give ourselves, as trainees, a forum where we can reflect on what is being moved, touched and why. This is especially true when we are dealing with clients. The better that we know ourselves, the more comfortable we can be with the projections of our clients.

Given the high burn out rate of therapists, it would appear essential to me for trainees to make time to become comfortable with their vulnerabilities before

forging ahead and taking on clients. I strongly feel that therapists are not superheroes and our vulnerabilities, "our crack", is something that we have to understand and acknowledge.

Part of my reason for doing this piece was that, as someone working in the field, I was constantly coming up against this idea of "expert". I am aware of the power often bestowed upon a therapist and the hierarchy that seems often to require de-construction before I can begin doing therapy with someone. What I mean is that, as therapist, I am often perceived by clients as expert and part of my struggle as a dramatherapist-in-training has been with that assignment.

Working in a hospital environment I have been witness to the "othering", which Michelle Fine (1994) discusses at length in her article, and part of this work will, I hope, serve to in some way counter this myth of therapist as expert and client as "other." In my work with adolescents, the feedback I received was of a genuine appreciation of the lack of othering. They explained that they did not feel on the low end of a hierarchical situation. They did not feel less for being younger or for being a client but felt accepted and understood. Their role in the therapy was clearly defined as being in partnership with the therapist to explore their reality their struggles and their creative strengths. They were in an empowered position as co-creator of a healing space; they understood that, without their input, therapy would not happen and that my role was not to sit in judgement of them, an expert who knows more than they do about themselves in a couple of

sessions. They understood that my role was one of holding a space, suggesting creative activities to deepen explorations and perhaps, most importantly, one of a human being who would accompany them on part of the journey ahead.

There is a huge burden on the therapist who carries a title of “expert” or superhero and being human is much more appealing to me as well as being much more empowering to the client. This acknowledgement of our “crack” provides great strength and integrity in that accepting ourselves and knowing our limits enables us to better accept our clients and their limits.

The same is true with familiarizing ourselves with dramatherapy techniques, using them on ourselves gives us a greater understanding of the effects and consequences of these techniques. The more familiar we are with the internal workings of the techniques the more intuitively we can apply them. From an ethical standpoint, it would appear to me to be essential to experience what we are in effect prescribing.

I feel that this type of open reflection on the training and its effects can also be of use for the institutions that provide training. Spending time looking closely at this process of becoming can facilitate a better understanding of the needs of a person during this process and can help training programs evolve to better provide for those needs. If the training environment encourages self-reflection and self-practice, then it will in effect be encouraging not only the personal

growth and professional development of dramatherapists, but also the effectiveness of the practice of dramatherapy.

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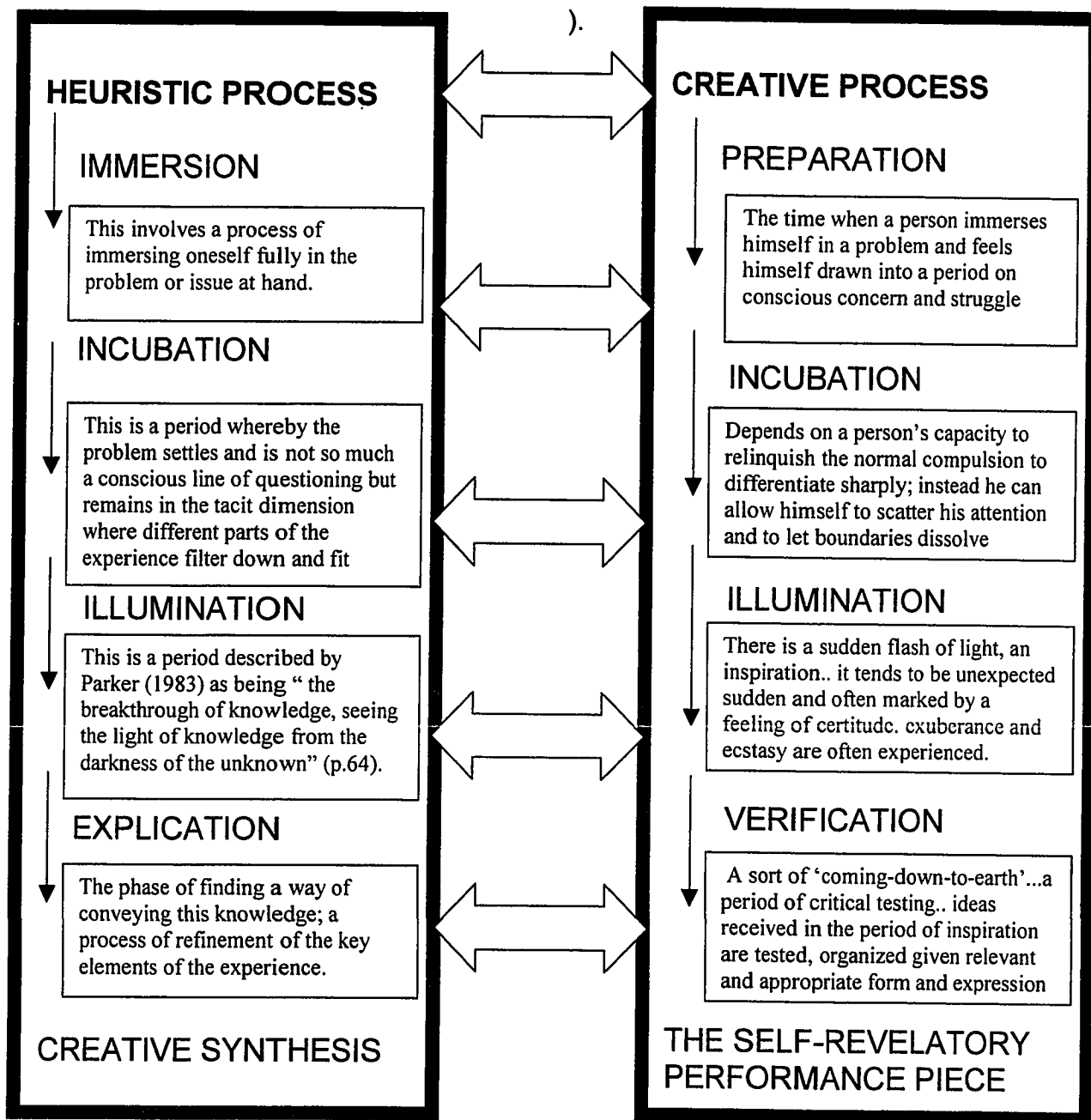
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Appendices

Appendix A





THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING

MIND THE GAP

at all levels of performance

THE ART OF BEING CYNICAL

infinite

3964 ST LAURENT

3&4 DECEMBER

EMBODIMENT

FUSION

BODY

DIFFERENTIATION

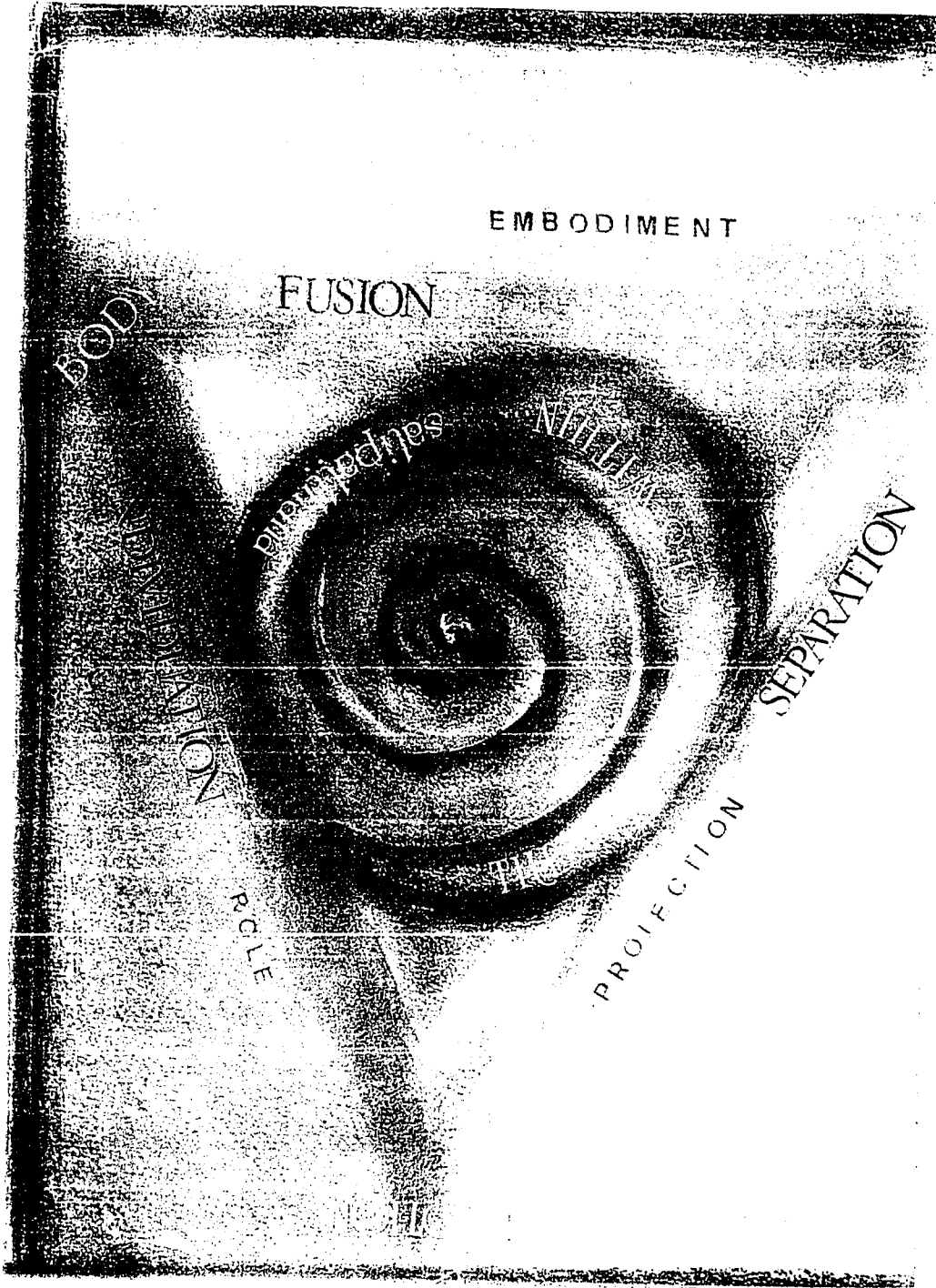
WILL

REINTEGRATION

SEPARATION

PRINCIPLE

PROJECTION



There is a crack in everything... Mind the Gap!

Performed and created by: Samantha May

Réalisateur: Pierre-Charles Millette

Welcome and thank you for supporting this experience.

This work is an unscripted structured inquiry into the process of becoming; more specifically the process of becoming a dramatherapist. It takes the form of a self-revelatory performance piece. The nature of this type of performance asks for engagement in the moment, that one be spontaneously interactive with a current state of being. The presence of the audience takes the place of the fourth wall of this space allowing the full unfolding of this theatre. You as witness take part in its making.

Any reflections on your experience of the performance are very welcome and will enhance the journey of inquiry. Material for this purpose is available in the lobby.

This exploration sits within a framework made up of a synthesis of dramatherapy concepts and diverse theoretical models. Additional information is available upon request.

A humungous special milles-merci to Monsieur Pierre-Charles merci pour ta foi et ton regard dans la réalisation de cette folie.

The list of those whose presence and feedback helped shape this piece is too long but a big fat thank you to you all. Extras go to: my little family for being themselves, Stephen Snow for believing in the project, Ginette for giving me courage, Guy you just rock, Elizabeth for getting it over and over again & Eve for her time graciously donated - not forgetting the playsaving Zee and the infamous crack in everything.

"There is a crack in everything that is where the light gets in." Leonard Cohen.

"Mind The Gap" London Public Transport.

Please feel free to explore the play space after the show.

Samantha May