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“Taking Care” as a Pedagogue/Actor/Son in a Theater/Drama Process

Warren Linds

Debora: What I'm interested in is how you got to the theater transforming the playwright, the director, the actors.

Warren: I was working in international development education—global education—hosting visitors from the developing world who came to Canada to speak about development. A lot of them were doing popular education both in their own countries and here, based on Paulo Freire's work. In the mid-80's I had the opportunity to train people in the Caribbean using video for community development. I started thinking, "It's not simply about communicating information about community development, but also developing people's own cultural skills." I joined a group of activists in Regina involved in Central American support. We formed ourselves into a popular theater company and for about eight years did theater pieces with groups at conferences and workshops. In 1991, I came into contact with power plays, an adaptation of Theater of the Oppressed. In 1991, we started working with high schools.

Debora: How did you do that?

Warren: We'd work with a group of 30–35 high school students and led them in an intensive workshop on racism where they would develop a play of their own that they would perform to their peers.

Debora: What happened to you in this process? How did you feel yourself changing?

Warren: I was part of another project using this process to work on issues affecting seniors. There I became more aware that I was part of the process—my life as a theater worker intertwined with my life as a son of a mother who was in an early phase of Alzheimer's, and came at the same time I was starting graduate school. So I hadn't read anything about this stuff; I'd just practiced it. But now for the last three years I've been integrating theory with the . . .

Debora: Realities?

Warren: Yeah. It's an ongoing process.

Elijah: By exploring narratives, you start to see your identity in flow. There is no static "I"—a very different take on identity. How is it for you?

Warren: I'm trying to see what happens in these theater processes. I learn by doing and I've acted, facilitated, and directed in plays, but I never really connected deeply to an issue I was helping others explore until this [the story in the essay] happened and how I fit into it—outside the theater—in the real issues people deal with. We have an evolving identity, that constantly shifts, depending on the relationships. It operates on multiple levels as well as on a continuum. I'm just trying to get at the idea that as teachers and facilitators we move back and forth at different levels and in different contexts and it is through these flowing, and embodied, movements that passionate engagement occurs.



To Ruth (Schwarzfeld) Linds, 1921—. Mother, friend. She challenged and inspired me to think; in many ways, without her this work would not have been possible. Though she will not be able to read this she is always present as I continue to open up the possibilities for myself and the people I work with.

Everyone, whether they acknowledge it or not, is serving an apprenticeship for elderhood.

(Minister, 1981)

This essay is the interplay of a scripted theater process with my life as a pedagogue. It examines how knowing and meaning emerges in performance in a living practice of theater/drama in education as moments of action are interwoven with the emotions of one's life.

My study explores the often hidden, but fluid, identities in becoming a facilitator in transformative drama—for example, as a teacher, researcher, facilitator, participant, audience member. Narratives of practice read through different forms and voices of my emerging identities of facilitator help me draw attention to my practice. By exploring these narratives we begin to see my identity in flux and flow: there is no static "I" that exchanges experiences with an audience or one "experience" the we focus on. I play with types of texts and languages, bringing together BodyMindSpirit through word, body, gesture, feeling, and theory to bring us face-to-face with kinesthetic and discursive experience.

One way I conceive of this is to play with the idea of metaxis¹...which, Boal (1995) explains, is

the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds: their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created (43).

An example of this process of metaxic "becoming" began with my involvement in a video theater project on the care of the elderly. In 1994–1995 I was an actor, cowriter, and cocreator of "Curtains for Hilda" (JustUs Players, 1994) as I participated in collectively creating a play for caregivers on preventing violence toward older adults in care. To develop the work, we interviewed the disabled residents of a rehabilitation res-

idence, workshopped the script for them, and spent a morning looking at the conditions in a special care home.

Although the play in its structure was a safe place to talk about "those" characters rather than ourselves, and was to be used as a "rehearsal for reality" (Boal, 1979), it became for me an overlapping of realit(ies)...the story of the characters became interwoven with the story of my life. Though the video was designed for staff training, the drama also brought out many issues confronting all of us as we strived to put our ideals of liberation and emancipation into practice in our relations with our aging parents.

Using extracts from the script and narrative this writing questions how, in dealing with Bill's story and my own and in other work, do I as a pedagogue act instead of "just playing a role"? How is my living experience contiguous, unfolding and enfolding on itself across time and space? How I live my life as Warren becomes inseparable from how I live my life as Warren, theater worker, and raises further questions about my/our own ethical practices as a pedagogue (From Greek, *paedagogos*, one who accompanies children, Smith, 1997, p. 272).

In the play, the character that I would become, "Bill King," was a character I have been/am becoming, with feelings, thoughts, and a life and a relationship with an elderly mother in an institution. At the time my own mother was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and still living at home, so the "system" was still an abstract concept. Bill had a mother in an institution and he was trying to help her adjust, talking to staff to improve her care...but who didn't have time to visit her often so,

(Mr. King comes in, stamping his feet and rubbing his hands together.)

Mr. King: Boy this is a cold winter...Hi, how's my mum?

Bea Holden: Oh, hi Bill. (leafing through report) Nothing about

a year later, I was in Vancouver, beginning graduate school and lived for a month with my mother as my father and I prepared to put her into a "Home" as we euphemistically call it. I was now the son Warren who had been "Bill" and now was "Bill/Warren" as the text of the script overlapped with the living

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her in last
 night's report. I assume she's had
 a good night. She'll be so glad to
 see you.

In the hall

(Mr. King goes down the hall and
 knocks at a door.) Mum, mum,
 mum are you up?

(Mr. King opens the door, sees
 the bed curtains drawn and the
 light off. He

returns to the hallway.)

Mr. King: Maria, why isn't my
 mum up yet?

Maria: She isn't?

Mr. King: no.

Maria: I have no idea.

(Ruby and Bea have been watch-
 ing the exchange from the side.

Ruby comes
 forward.)

Ruby: Mrs. King didn't want to
 get up this morning. She made
 that very clear.

So, rather than forcing the issue I

text of my life. After she moved
 into the "home," and therefore,
 into the
 "system" I became enmeshed in
 what had previously been an
 abstract net. I
 visited with my mother, cajoled
 staff to spend more time with her,
 and visited
 her on my way home from uni-
 versity. Warren who had been
 Bill now knew a bit
 about what actions needed to be
 taken, what issues to raise, as we
 had
 explored the subtle complexities
 in our research, not of "abuse"
 which must be
 reported, but of "neglect"; uncar-
 ing systems and lack of knowl-
 edge about my
 mother, not a patient, not a resi-
 dent, but Ruth. (I remember early
 on as my
 mother suffered because of her
 unhappiness of being there, a
 staff member
 commenting to me that she was
 glad she had known Ruth before
 she
 deteriorated...she wasn't a
 patient with depression but a per-
 son who had been
 happier...and could be happy
 again.

A Turn, A Look with her eyes
 Ruthie, Ruthie?
 Yes

gave her some time out.

Mr. King: But she couldn't reach her call bell. Isn't that a little dangerous?

Ruby: She must've thrown it away in a rage. She wouldn't cooperate this morning.

Mr. King: My mother always cooperates.

Ruby: Maybe with you, Mr. King, but she takes everything out on us girls.
(Mr. King looks to Miss Holden.)

Bea: I can vouch for that, Mr. King. Your mother can be quite difficult. In any case, we'll have her up in a jiffy.

Mr. King: Well, Aunt Gladys will be here any minute. Mum really enjoys shopping with her....Aunt Gladys so seldom can get here from the coast.

Ruby: I'll go get Hilda up!!
(Ruby leaves)

Are you O.K.?

Head shakes yes.

Responding, Reacting
Perhaps I'll feed you beans today. You like beans? she doesn't, never has, but now she eats everything.

A resounding laugh.

What once was, is.

For a moment.

To sustain us.

In the summer of 1997, I facilitated a workshop called Taking Care....Forum Theater and Issues of Health/Institutional Care at the International Festival of Theater of the Oppressed, using the video of Curtains for Hilda to talk about theater and issues affecting the elderly. The workshop used an adaptation of Forum Theater. Forum Theater provided an opportunity to explore issues of institutional care affecting older adults. This workshop presented the process of developing the Forum Theater play/video and an opportunity for participants to investigate both the issues raised

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Bea:

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Maria (glancing at Bea): I'll help.

(Maria leaves)

Bea: Your mother will be up in a jiffy. Why don't you get a coffee while you wait.

SCENE SEVEN Near The Nursing Station

Mr. King (greeting his mum who is in a wheelchair) Morning

Mum. Hilda: (a bit confused by the rush of events, but glad to see her son): Hi, Bill.

Mr. King: I'll be right with you. I just want to speak with Miss Holden for a minute.

(Mr. King approaches the nursing station)

Mr. King: Miss Holden, I was wondering if I could speak with you for a moment.

Bea: Sure, how can I help you?

Mr. King: Can Maria be assigned on a regular basis to my Mother?

in the video and the ways to use it to apply the Theater of the Oppressed pedagogy in similar areas.

I remember the reaction of a theater group from Brest, France who remarked that they had never really thought of those issues, even though they had parents who were elderly. We often think of theater for social change as covering issues for our own generation. In this case, it extended these issues to our own dilemmas as we attempt to live with what happens with elderly parents.

I remember being scared doing these workshops...these were after all people from all over the world with their own skills and experiences in theater. But I found I had been engaged with these issues both as a theater worker and a human being living with them. Both those aspects inhabited my own Mind/Body/Spirit. Caring for my mother and caring for the issues involved had come together.

Bea: Your mother must like Maria a lot.

Mr. King: Yes, Maria's a great nurse.

Bea: Nurse's aide, Mr. King.

Mr. King: Oh yes, of course.

You're the nurse. Anyway, how about it?

Bea: Out of the question, Mr.

King, I'm afraid. You know how the system here

works. Three shifts and the

buddy system. It works well and it gives variety.

Mr. King: But my mother needs more companionship. I'd like to

be with her

more. . . .

Bea: We know how much you care about your mother, Mr.

King, but short of

moving her to a facility that permits private nurses and hiring

one or even

two, well!? Meanwhile, for round-

the-clock care, your mother is in

excellent

As part of the festival I also co-facilitated (with Turning Point Theater, a British company that had themselves produced their own interactive play on Caregiving) a three-day workshop with a 55-plus peer support and educational outreach group. This primarily Portuguese-speaking group of mostly women, working out of St. Christopher house in Toronto, was educating other seniors and community organizations about the issue of isolation and abuse in families and the community.²

In the process of doing the workshop I discovered some of the issues that concerned immigrant seniors. I also saw that how I related to them and their concerns was enhanced by my emerging becoming of son/caregiver with my mother in an institution and with my father in his own home. One lady in particular, 83 who spoke no English, took a shine to me. We danced in one exercise and in our performance of the (nonverbal) scenes in a public performance at the end of the festival gave me a big hug in

hands with staff like Maria and
 Ruby here at Tick-Tock Manor!!!

Mr. King: Well, maybe so. I have
 to go out of town for the rest of
 the week.

I'll be back next week and
 maybe we can sort this out then.

Bea: Have a good trip, Mr. King.

SCENE TEN Seminar
 Room

Bea: I want to talk to you, too,
 Maria. (Maria defers to Miss
 Holden)

Bea: I had a compliment today
 about you from a resident's
 family.

Maria: Oh! That's nice.

Bea: Yes, but watch you don't
 fall behind schedule, Maria. All
 morning

patient care must be complete
 before 11 am in order to keep the
 noon meal on
 time.

Maria: I understand.

parting.
 I was in a performance there on
 stage in Toronto. A performance
 of myself as
 facilitator, caring for these
 women...Caring, coming from
 the embodied
 experience of relationship with
 my mother. A place to be
 human....

I was in a performance there on
 stage in Toronto. A performance
 of myself as
 facilitator, caring with these
 women in "a rare, unforgotten
 experience of total reciprocity"
 (Moreno, 1960, p. 15). Caring. a
 place to be human...treating
 them as I was/would be treating
 my own mother.

People in the audience comment-
 ed on how "genuine" the piece of
 theater they
 had seen was. Although it was a
 forum piece, here it was a piece
 of life of
 the seniors and what the audience
 was becoming as children and
 as
 adults moving forward in years.

One audience member comment-
 ed afterwards as to how real my
 interactions with
 the group were. I was Warren,
 facilitator but also son of Ruth
 living within
 the system of her own care. It

Bea: Don't get bogged down.

You see, Maria, these old people are very lonely and they'll try every trick in the book to get attention; and then, before you can say "Bedpan!" you get behind in your work. So try to keep working while you're talking, and keep one eye on the clock!

SCENE ELEVEN The Lobby
near the Nursing Station

(Hilda is sitting in her wheelchair in the lobby. Mr. King is with her.)

Mr. King: I'm trying to work things out, but I'm running late today. I have to call work. Oh, Maria, can you help my mother for a minute?
Maria (hesitating as he speaks to her, then walks by): I'm sorry, I'm in a hurry (then looks back sorrowful-

had been interesting for me to see the reactions of my peers, not based on the issues/themes in the play but on the human relationships we had created, perhaps enabling a reflection on the audience's part of their own relationships with their own (becoming) elderly parents and their own apprenticeships for elderhood.

They didn't need to have the same stories but they needed to "dip into the wellsprings" (Wikan, p. 471) of themselves to use as a bridge to others. This doesn't happen through just wanting to observe in a detached way. "Practical exposure to a world of 'urgency, necessity' is required" (Wikan, p. 471).

Acting human through genuine relationships that are important because they "are the mirror in which one can see oneself as one is" (Rahnema, 1990, p. 218). What Smith (1997) has called "finding one's Original Face," becoming awake to what sustains us. Living awake... a matter of not depending on language, rationality or culture, it requires a simple openness and

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curiosity to that which meets us
at every turn, every thing,
every thought, feeling, idea, per-
son. I was, and continued to be,
constantly surprised as I found
myself as son/caregiver
facilitating the process as my
own process of taking care of
myself and of
those I loved...and those I was
working within popular theater.

One day later in the year I walked into the home where my
mother lived.

Nurse: Hi, Bill.

Warren: Huh?

Nurse: I'm taking this course on dementia care.

Last week we saw a video with you in it.

When I saw you I said to the others in the class,

I know that guy. He's the son of one of our residents!

What comes from all this? Smith (1997) says that people don't have
"experiences" but they exist inseparably from them. Couture (1997)
writes that experience is a structure built by text(s) of our stances taken
in the world, "moments of action weaving patterns of love or pain, fear or
hate, sorrow or celebration into life's choreography" (Fels, 1995).

In this part of my life connections were made bodily through experi-
ence. Through going through the process my own bodymindemotionspir-
it spoke if I was able to listen to it. What I lived through opened up pos-
sibilities for interpreting and understanding new experiences. As I lived
through similar experiences I began to listen better to the experiences of
others (Howard, 1996). There is a knowing that emerges from the writ-
ing. That knowing not only informs the writing but writes the informing.

The play was no longer just something on stage, but part of my life.

What has emerged in the process of writing and thinking about the experience was that to conduct and be conducted by a play/workshop called Taking Care required taking care, no caring for the people I was working with and caring for the issues we were dealing with.

David Jardine (1997) shares a similar thing that happened to "Ellen," a nursing student who found that her skills as a nurse were called upon while doing an interview of a stroke survivor. Referring to the "reality of stroke and its effects" he says there is something profoundly intractable about this experience of silence and speechlessness and withdrawal.

Dealing with this phenomenon well, understanding it deeply and generously and speaking its truth, might also be a problem of character, of wisdom, of patience, of becoming someone who can hear and tell the truth of the tales that their own lives tell, unafraid, willing to not blunt the intractability of living one's life with troubles such as strokes and the mumbling drools of loved ones... (165).

And I find myself wondering also...

In dealing with Bill's story and my own and in working with those Portuguese seniors, was my living experience folding in on itself, one experience wrapped up and, at the same time, (e)merging with all the others?

I agree with Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1990) that there is no way to explain logically what I did. Ethics emerged in the (com)passionate actions of everyday life. It is in the groundless and shifting sands of experience that I and my work "enfolded one into each other and unfolded from one another in the fundamental circularity that is life itself" (Varela, 1991, p. 217).

Even in retrospect I cannot say one interaction preceded one another. They coincided, overlapped, (inter)acted, interplayed. Because I was/am not a detached observer reflecting on the situation of those moments of my life, these "holistic and gripping experiences" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1990) became the basis of the development of my own skillful coping with the people (and the interplay within their own lives) I was working with.

Obligation happens (Caputo, 1993) and in this case, it happened in the process of discovering myself in the character of Bill...

who had been Bill and who was also the son of Ruth. There was something in that whole process that I recognized then and continued to do, something that might return, not a "lesson" or a "moral" or a "technique," but acting with care and obligation, compassion, thinking with the heart," feeling-thought (Wikan, 1992, p. 463).

Com passion: with passion, desire, love.

Compassion: together feel, that

spontaneous compassion that arises when one is not caught in the habitual patterns—when one is not performing volitional actions out of karmic cause and effect—is not done with a sense of need for feedback from the recipient. It is the anxiety about feedback—the response of the other—that causes us tension and inhibition in our action. When action is done without the business-deal mentality, there can be relaxation. (Varela et al., 1991, p. 249).

To go beyond our own egos means going beyond responses from others, that everything we do is traded for something else...

Wondering

Habitual patterns of mother-son conversation

Standing at her side, observing how she makes cinnamon buns
Now I am an adult, caring for her, with hope in the
impossibility/possibility that
some day she will say, "Thanks for being with me"

Cause and effect, the need for feedback

I am asked, "Does she recognize you?"

I never answer. Or I answer, in some way she does,

With a look of her eyes,
an expression on her face, that shake of her head.

But does it matter?

Yes,
to remember her as a person,
remember that laugh at the beans (the thought of eating beans)

Moments, moments together of connection, of removal of inhibition, of playfulness.

This is a risky endeavor because

passion moves you out of your comfort zone into a place of risk, adventure, of daring. You meet the circumstances and challenges of your life boldly. It's not that you don't feel doubt or fear—it's that your passion is stronger than your fear. It allows you to see beyond that which is in the way of your dreams, your desire, your destiny, and to go forward with enthusiasm (De Angelis, 1998, p. 72).

I remember being struck by something in the movie *Smoke* (directed by Wayne Wang and starring Harvey Keitel). In it characters did things for each other out of a sense of community. A did something for B, B did something for D, C did something for E, D did something for G, etc., and eventually G might do something for A. It was not a linear sort of doing things for each other, it created a complex community as their lives sectored and intersected. I would argue that sometimes moments of spontaneous compassion coemerge with our distancing ourselves from habitual patterns or routines (because they are so unusual). For example, two years ago I was traveling through West Africa. As a North American white man traveling through Africa I was quite aware of myself and the interactions of people around me and with me. On many occasions during that journey there occurred what I came to subsequently call unexpected instances of generosity/compassion by total strangers, matched by instances of gratitude on my part, made more remarkable by the obvious physical and sartorial differences between me and the African people I encountered. At first when this happened I was surprised, I didn't know how to respond. But no response was necessary.

These rare, unforgotten experiences of total reciprocity (Moreno, 1960) do occur in our day-to-day lives. We are just not aware of them. Our senses are dulled by the routines of existence. We do not notice the transcendental moments of compassion. Or if we do we allocate them to

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the human interest section of the newspaper (the *Vancouver Sun* actually ran a daily series of such stories in its City Limits section). These moments in my past and present enable me to go beyond Me, trying to incorporate the Other, which ironically helps me to just relax and live. The meaning of all of this doesn't read in words or texts, but has evolved in my meeting and interacting with others in a constantly moving shared space where relationships

are defined,

and defined by,

(our) interactions with our surroundings.

What emerges (in this part of my life) is the concern for a living practice of theater, a practice that is folded into the character of the settings I am part of. How was I trying to enlarge the spaces of the possible (Sumara & Davis, 1997) within the communities I worked with? How I live my life as Warren became inseparable from how I lived my life as Warren, theater worker, and raised further questions about my own ethical practices.

In other words, this process of caring became
a working apprenticeship of my own life.

(and continues to be)

ENDNOTES

1. *Metaxis*, from *metaxu*: adverb, metaphor, verb, grammar, preposition, plural, etc. In the state of, in the midst, betwixt, between, between-whiles, in the interval, neither good nor bad (Liddell, 1996, p. 1115).
2. Two years later (July 1999) I was informed that the group has continued in its work. It is using the theater skills they have developed to provide outreach, for example, to Chinese and Vietnamese seniors' groups in their community.

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