

# *A Chest of Broken Toys*

A Journal of Developmental Transformations



Published since 2015

Institute for Developmental Transformations

[www.developmentaltransformations.com/journal](http://www.developmentaltransformations.com/journal)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

### *A Chest of Broken Toys: A Journal of Developmental Transformations*

This Journal is an open access online journal for articles on Developmental Transformations, particularly those articles that may not fit well into the traditional formats and limits of other journals in the field. The Journal does not accept letters, blogs, poetry, or announcements. The Journal is published continuously as one volume, and can be accessed on the website: [www.developmentaltransformations.com/journal](http://www.developmentaltransformations.com/journal). Articles that are well-written, engaging, evocative, animated, and self-reflective are welcome.

#### Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief	David Read Johnson	New Haven, Connecticut
Associate Editor	Fred Landers	Seattle, Washington
Editorial Consultant	Daniel Wiener	Amherst, Massachusetts

#### Editorial Board

Jason Butler	Montreal, Canada
Cecilia Dintino	New York, New York
Dolmen Domikles	Sussex, England
John Hazlett-Dickinson	Bristol, England
Christine Mayor	New Haven, Connecticut
Warren McCommons	San Francisco, California
Stephanie Omens	Hackensack, New Jersey
Renee Pitre	New Haven, Connecticut
Adam Reynolds	New York, New York
Nisha Sajjani	Boston, Massachusetts
Greta Schnee	Worcester, Massachusetts
Ann Smith	Easton, Maryland
Navah Steiner	New York, New York
Jaap Welten	Heerlen, The Netherlands
Jennifer Wilson	New York, New York
Eleanor Zeal	London, England

---

# *A Chest of Broken Toys*

## Guidelines for Authors

*A Chest of Broken Toys* accepts submissions of manuscripts that explore any aspect of Developmental Transformations as a practice. The manuscripts must be well-written, but can be in any language and in any style, as long as these are consistent throughout the text. The manuscripts can be of any length and can be written in experimental and nontraditional formats. Copyrights will be maintained by the authors. Manuscripts are published continuously as they are accepted and edited. Authors must include a statement of up to 250 words that certifies the biases, incompleteness, inadequacies, and uncertainties of their article, including mentions of rejections by other journals. Authors are encouraged to first seek publication of their work in traditional journals before submitting to *A Chest of Broken Toys*. Articles are peer-reviewed and a member of the Editorial Board is invited to write a Commentary that will be published simultaneously with each article.

## Glossary

- DvT      DvT is an attitude and a practice regarding experience, based on playing with the discrepancy between experience and the representation of experience, which aims to lower one's fear of the instability that this discrepancy generates. DvT is applied in therapy, personal growth, education, performance, advocacy, and recreation, or it can be practiced outside of any of these social frames.
- i*              Experience is nonrepeating.
- m'*            The present moment has never been before.
- !              The prime discrepancy: The representation of experience is not the same as experience. The primary affects of delight, awe, and alarm arise when the prime discrepancy is perceived.

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

R                    The sum of repeating forms: the construction of reality (through difference, preference, territory, history).

The fundamental instabilities:

<i>po'a</i>	The representation of experience is always incomplete.
<i>h'ish</i>	The representation of experience is always inexact.
<i>t'</i>	The representation of experience is always inaccurate.
<i>x'i</i>	The representation of experience is always intermittent.

Playspace            The mutual agreement between the playor and player that their behaviors are playful: meaning that they are representations of experience and not their experience (principles of discrepancy and restraint from harm), and that these representations can be shared between them (principles of mutuality and reversibility).

Varielation            The playor's purposeful variations in response to, and around, the player's representations, or repeating forms (in congruent, faithful, emergent, divergent ways).

Dimensionalization    The resulting higher order reorganization of the player's representations that integrates the discrepant information created by the playor's varielations and the fundamental instabilities (through play of presence, passions, possessions, powers).

Conplay, n.  
Conplacious, adj.      Words denoting an attitude or action that criticizes, restricts, or prevents playful behavior. Prevalent in many societies, institutions, families, and people. DvT is the antidote to conplay.

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

### DvT Textual Notations

- ' Indicates any unstable concept
- : Indicates “from my point of view,” “my impression of,” as in “I loved the :mountain.” Not the actual thing.
- ^ Indicates alternate but less preferred names as in “You are a jealous^selfish person.” Not a synonym.
- ~ Indicates word is only an approximation, as in “The man was insistent~ that I leave.” Equivalent to adding “ish.”
- !' Presence of the primary affect of delight
- !^ Presence of the primary affect of alarm
- !` Presence of the primary affect of awe

Cover Art: Nuno de Matos, 2011

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

### Table of Contents

Guidelines for Authors	ii
Glossary	ii
Introductory Editorial <i>David Read Johnson</i>	1
Let me be your carried one... A meditation on po'a, t', and h'ish <i>David Read Johnson</i> <i>Reflections by Bonnie Harnden, Joan Wittig, and Ann Smith</i>	2
Developmental Transformations and Playing with the Unplayable <i>Cecilia Dintino, Navah Steiner, Ann Smith, and Kimberly Carlucci Galway</i>	12
Commentary: <i>Jason D. Butler</i>	32
Tending to the Supervisory Relationship Through Developmental Transformations <i>Robert Miller, Sofia Vgenopoulou, and David Read Johnson</i>	35
Commentary: <i>Navah Steiner</i>	53
Conversare: Developmental Transformations and Social Change NS Delete: Justice <i>David Read Johnson and Nisha Sajnani</i>	57
Commentary: <i>Christine Mayor</i>	78
Capoeira and Developmental Transformations <i>Mira Rozenberg</i>	81
Commentary: <i>Adam Reynolds</i>	92

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

### Introductory Editorial

And so it begins. Our ongoing dialogue with repetition and repeating forms. Developmental Transformations is a practice of noticing, revealing, and animating the nonrepeating elements of the present moment, an effort that always fails. It is in that moment of failure, perhaps, as one falls, that one brushes or nearly brushes that elusive, unstable experience: presence with another.

This *Journal* is an open space for various recordings of these failed attempts through Developmental Transformations, though no doubt they will be ripe with familiar arguments and illustrations designed to establish credibility, gain recognition, and share knowledge. In addition, hopefully, there will be many examples of surprise: a new turn of phrase, a shocking insight, a disturbing proposition, and ideas so wrong they jolt us out of the comfort of our dearly constructed worldview.

The authors of articles in this *Journal* are tasked to articulate, ahead of time, their understanding of the limitations, biases, shortcuts, and outright inadequacies of their work. These reflections are included in the beginning of each article as an *Author's Certification of Brokenness*. From the point of view of Developmental Transformations, not to know these things deeply and be comfortable sharing them publicly is to be only at the beginning of the path.

Consistent with DvT principles, the *Journal* will be published as one continuous volume: The page numbers will simply continue on and not repeat, like life, mostly~.

David Read Johnson  
New Haven Connecticut  
March 1, 2015

# *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Let me be your carried one...  
A meditation on po'a, t', and h'ish<sup>1</sup>

David Read Johnson

Reflections by Bonnie Harnden, Joan Wittig, and Ann Smith

## *Author's Certification of Brokenness*

*This article was originally prepared as a performance, so much of the lyrical and rhythmic sound of the words is lost in its written form. The article reveals the poignant dream of the author to be a beat poet or modern rapper, borrowing blatantly from stream of consciousness writers such as James Joyce. The lack of punctuation is mostly for the delight of the author in frustrating readers, who, when they give up on this piece, will confirm the author's deeply held arrogance that few others can understand him. The weave of romance evoked in the back and forth reflections between the author and his three colleagues captures nicely the author's self-indulgence and grandiosity, but what else is new. Most significantly, the article is outdated, as it was written before the discovery of x'i, though one can discern hints of it in the text.*



## *Preface*

Let me prepare you for what is to come, to set up the frame the context the situation beforehand so that you are not surprised pushed off balance or unnecessarily upset, god forbid we are upset enough as it is, and a solid

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. David Read Johnson, Ph.D., RDT-BCT is Director, Institute for Developmental Transformations; Co-Director, Post Traumatic Stress Center, New Haven, CT; Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine. [ptsdcenter@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ptsdcenter@sbcglobal.net) Bonnie Harnden, M.A., RDT is Associate Professor, Concordia University, Montreal, CA. [bonnie.harnden@concordia.ca](mailto:bonnie.harnden@concordia.ca) Joan Wittig, M.S., BC-DMT, LCAT is Associate Professor and Director, Graduate Dance/Movement Therapy Program, Pratt Institute, New York. [jwittig@pratt.edu](mailto:jwittig@pratt.edu) Ann Smith, Ph.D., RDT is a psychologist at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Cambridge, MD. [annsmithphd@yahoo.com](mailto:annsmithphd@yahoo.com) This paper was presented as a performance at the Fifth Annual DvT Conference in New York City, October, 2008.



## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

framework even if it is constructed not given even *made up* will be greatly appreciated, the only problem being that the frame soon stands in for the experience, we confuse the map with the terrain, the concept with the reality, the idea of the relationship *with* the relationship, and so we become separated from what is and this separation is why all forms are turbulent and impermanent. So I desire to end *the wobble of the world* but I have found nothing to hold onto that is not itself moving so I will have to master it by outsmarting it through understanding, yes, ah ha! And I have come to an understanding: that the wobble of the world cannot be stopped and that my attempt to understand it is largely what I do to disturb myself. That's it. Any reasonable person would desist from this useless effort and just enjoy life the best they can, but I have tried this approach and have failed

*po'a*

I am going to begin with you, you who I seek, you who I love and desire, you who constantly eludes me with your layers of enticing behavior evoking the presence of things I cannot see or hear or smell. Let me find some stable ground to lie upon and hold you to stop this subtle spinning and swaying this constant newness and strangeness that causes me to find some form of adaptation in each moment this accommodation to your needs expressed and unexpressed visible and invisible which you require of me though I cannot hear the unexpressed cannot see the invisible, I should be able to guess I suppose and I do, guess, all the time but I no longer pride my performance at the game, I am tired I suppose of your needs and the surprises of the hidden side of you. Oh that I could take all of you in at once see both sides of you no all sides of you no inside and outside of you all at once so I can know and not have to keep turning you around touching you all over running my fingers or lips up and down every side of you to gather up the all of you, I am so dissatisfied with my singular location my unique perspective that really is just another word for a blocked sight line my one angle on life when there are so many others yes I see them all the time see that they gather up another side of you parts of you stolen from me, I want you *all*

You are like the dark side of the moon, I know it is there but have never seen it, I ask you to describe it to me and you do and I place that picture of it in my mind but it is too flimsy for me, I want to be there. What bothers me is that like the dark side of the moon the side of you that you do not show me is not dark to others, the sun shines on that dark side too at the half or new moon because the

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

sun lies at a different perspective and that is what bothers me because others can see that side of you from their perspective, it's not fair I should have all of you. They can see from their perspective things kept invisible to me which bothers me for you are mine all of you, right? Shall I say "I love you, for the *most* part?" Dare I say, "Will *much* of you be mine?" Can I say, "I give *some* of me to you?" it defeats the idea of our relationship I know it is an illusion but if life has to be an illusion let it not be a defeated illusion! Our relationship must not be like the moon and earth you must face me at all times with all sides of you I must have a three dimensional view of you, my sensors must be placed on all parts of your existence. I must have your smell your taste your sound your sight your touch your soul not this, your slipping away from me just slightly your turning to the side just so, eyes glazed just a little as you cling to an Elsewhere that I seem never able to reach

My singular location is the source of my longing to be elsewhere, upstairs at home Paris flying tomorrow or a long time ago far far away, not to escape but to not miss so much, I live in the land of the missing nearly everything is absent as if I am looking at life through a narrow tube. I *am* looking at life through a narrow tube which is why I must keep moving the tube up and down and all around but all I get is partial information so I need you to commit yourself to me to offer all of yourself to me to still your own movements and possibilities to come with me everywhere and not simply pass by, these brief meetings fill me with longing let me know you will be home when I return know what you will order in the restaurant know what your favorite color is and always will be, to announce a change before you make it so I am not surprised you think I am exaggerating no I am enraged I am saddened, I am afraid

### *Reflections – Bonnie Harnden*

*You told me to take you in and I did. I'm sorry if I'm a little dissociative I'm a little porous and you're a little intense. When the world trade center fell and I was working at the hospital on the crisis team and I was already fragile, exhausted, overworked, so many sad families....so many lost children....I remember running down the hall before the second tower fell...we went on code orange...we were told planes might be landing...be ready to receive more, receive more....sometimes when I leave my office now I have this feeling that a body is falling and is going to land on me. And it doesn't matter what kind of day I've had - whether I feel sad or satisfied by work well done, there they are, those*

## A Chest of Broken Toys

*falling, falling bodies...all that night I was on those planes as they came into those buildings....I was sitting in the seat with all of us as we realized at the last second as the buildings came up close that we were never getting off...I am never getting off.*

*When I came home that night I reached for you ---but you put your hand up to stop me---I reached for you---unusually so—I never show you how afraid I really am - how unsure (you don't like that do you?) but you put your hand up.*

*Overwhelmed by terror I showed you, finally, how small I felt, that I feel we all are...you put your hand up to push me away. I know my fear scared you, overwhelmed you got you in touch with your own fear which I think you like to ignore, I also wasn't keeping that distance you like, that distance you need, where you can imagine me...perfect, whole*

*You say you love me but I fear you don't, I fear that you love the idea of me and love parts of me, the way I hold your feelings, the way I am soft, holding, you love the image of me that you like to create in your head what you've made me in your mind unlined mysterious other...other*

*You never see all of me up close wrinkled, frail, human, falling  
I worry you love the idea of me.*

*LOVE ME*

*Catch me out of the air*

*Please*

*You say you want me to not be so mysterious*

*To see, to know, to be sure to not frighten you*

*So you could put down your narrow tube*

*But I think you like this view*

*I worry that it is when I become real, fleshed out, nuanced...hungry*

*That it trembles in your hands*

*I see how frightened you are*

*Of me*

*I'd like you to put me back into my body like the way you do sometimes when you're inside and you reach, reach my side of the moon and I stop falling and arrive. I'd like you to touch me harder, let go of your tunnel vision and walk to my side of the moon it's not that far...*

*I'm falling and I've been falling for a long time*

*You just don't see it*

*Because you don't want to*

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*I know you can't save me but I wish you'd try  
That is saving sometimes...trying  
I am falling past you  
You want to swallow me whole  
You miss the fact that I am falling past and away from you  
You never see  
You never see  
But perhaps it is I who am blinded  
At moments I only see you through my own lens  
Darkly...  
Can I really say what I think you are doing – experiencing of me?  
“Are you there”?*

*I'll be waiting for you  
On the other side of the moon  
My favorite color is...*

*t'*

When I am with you I am aware that I have to work to hold on to the feelings that I have for you, that seems silly but truly I am beset a bit by the feelings I do not have for you but might have for you or did have for you or want to have for you, let me explain, when you ask me “do I love you” I say yes because I do but then you sometimes go further and ask me to tell you why and then I tell you and name all the wonderful things you are such as beautiful or smart but as these names roll off my tongue the taste of the rejected ideas is left behind which is that you used to be more beautiful or you are smart except in some areas or that someone else is more beautiful or that I used to feel these things more strongly than I do now, even though I do still feel them except that the weight of all the things that you are not narrows my response and I inevitably drift off somewhat to scatter these intrusions and you then ask me why and I feel you are accusing me of not being completely authentic and I use one of my ways of ending the inquiry, no doubt each of us is left thinking of *someone else*

And I do want to be thinking only of you but how can I get around the fact that you are a subset of all the others and in order to attend to you I must sweep all the others to the side which is quite a task and once in a while as I sweep them

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

to the side one of them catches my attention momentarily and how is it that you notice that flicker enough so that when I look in your eyes we are *three*? I cannot think of you without purposefully not thinking of them

I think you see my struggle and it upsets you - you misunderstand and become worried or angry which burdens me more I don't like this and strangely this makes the feelings I don't have for you stronger, I blame you for this I shouldn't it's just a misunderstanding though I've never been able to make you understand

Oh how I am burdened by thinking for every time I name a thing in my mind I so quickly go through the list of near-things that it is not and I am left not only with the name of the thing but really more so with the things that it is not and almost always I wish the thing it is, was one of the things I considered it was not, so I live in a vast territory of disappointment that I must ignore. It is not fair because there are so many more things that are not than that are, the chances are stacked against reality whatever that may be. Holding firm with what I think is true is an exhausting enterprise and I am tired not of you, heaven's no not of you, heaven's no not of you. So despite this fatigue we should celebrate yes celebrate because there is no reason to wait for what I will never have, and I can do this, not only declare that the glass is half full that is optimism but imagine the glass is completely full that is love

*Reflections – Joan Wittig*

*As I listen to you tell me over and over and over that I am not enough, that when you turn your eyes to me your heart your mind really all you know is what I am not...I feel an opening in me. I know I will finally be free I can feel the freeness rising up in me. You set me free. I can stop now stop trying to be enough for you. No one is ever enough. I don't care that you find me lacking, that someone else is more beautiful or smarter. I don't care that all you know of me is what I am not. To think I will be free I can stop working I can stop worrying*

*Damn it! What do you want from me? I move forward, touching the heads of the others as I weep because they will understand they will never be enough either. I come back to my place and feel the twisting wringing frustration of this. Why aren't I enough? Why isn't what I offer to you enough? I see now that before I can be free I will have to face the grief the loss my sorrow at not being enough. You are right I do see your struggle and it does make me angry*

## A Chest of Broken Toys

*I don't want to be tied up in this. I reach up, opening, feeling the space within myself. I feel the possibility of movement, the opposite of allowing myself to be dragged down into that, mired in that. I stay up, loose, remembering my days as a dancer. I can do this I can keep moving I can take this I can move through it come out the other side strong and free*

*But what of the one who tells me I am not enough? I seem to have left him far behind. So where is the relationship? How is it that he does not see me? That not enough – that is his, not mine. Had I ever truly been seen, I would be known to be enough. And you say you can imagine the glass is completely full. That is love*

*h'ish*

I want you to tell me something. I need your advice. Please clarify for me. Say “yes.” Not only am I forced to accept partial bits of experience and the wrong bits of experience but I am presented constantly with only approximations of experience, I do not understand why I cannot have exactly what I am expecting, say “yes I will” I know this seems audacious and entitled and I have been told not to expect this but why must the world only approximate what is in my mind? I do not have outrageous needs, always, and when you say “yes” I am pleased but only until you comply and then I discover that even with your best intentions your compliance produces only something *like* what I asked for and when you look at me and coyly ask “how was that?” and I say, always, “perfect” it was not really perfect, the moments that seem perfect are those moments we want to remember forever like when we both said that same word just about at the same time or that night at the lake with the nearly full moon or that day you showed up almost exactly at the time you said you would and I was there too, these moments I will never forget, I love you for that, tell me “yes,” compare this to the vastness of the times the world including you are “way off” yes my whole world is way off from how I think about it all the time and I have learned to not tell you how off you are because it is not your fault – that took ten years to learn- and if I pointed it out I would end up yelling, god this angers me so, there is nothing I can do about it except say “perfect” a lot or “close enough” all the time until I cannot stand it any longer and erupt in “you don't understand me at all” and slam that door inside or outside leave the room and eventually depart from you

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Every concept I hold I seek in the world and cannot find it exactly, there is always an exception there is always that slight hesitation in your response after I speak, there is always a building that slightly occludes the ocean view we were promised there is always a slight smudge of lipstick on your lower lip a tiny mark on your pristine shoe a section of your hair that needs to be stroked back into place I spend so much time altering you to match my inner concept of you and you do a fine job which is why we are together both struggling to maintain this coherence between our image of our relationship and our relationship, oh how this consumes us

I satisfy myself with these approximations these near-completions by saying to myself I have time to finish them in the future I carry the missing over into the next moment to seek it there, only of course to get most of it but not all of it which I then carry over again, I am constantly leaning into the next moment with my unfulfilled desires I guess that is *becoming*, indeed I am that carried one that unexpressed remainder from the stream of territories I leave behind, I am the next note or word or gesture that animates within just before I strike the key or speak or move, the untuned note the unspoken word rising up emergent from the last approximation, uncapturable, alive. *I am that carried one*. Oh that I would be carried! It feels like falling perhaps you will carry me come with me into the next moment yes you can be my falling angel I will fall with you, in that way I will be comforted

Thank you for listening to my complaining I do not mean to complain I am a happy person I have so much I am so lucky to have what I have, really I live a blessed life perhaps not perfect but close enough...it is just that this is the life I am leading and believing I am leading and will continue to lead until my dissatisfaction as undeserving as it is overcomes me, drives me to disrupt it just stop doing it and do something else, this dissatisfaction comes from the slow building up of what I am not experiencing what I am only imagining and what I am expecting and these things eventually will overtake me and I will break something as I already have too many times, I am so sorry about that, I know I disappoint you I cannot keep up with your needs I know how you want me to be and I try but I cannot do it I slip outside and around it and I see your lines of upset I see your shades of disappointment I see your stillness of anger and I am glad you do not say anything because I might say something I will regret and diminish your needs or views or ideas as silly or stupid or tiring or selfish, my god they are selfish, my god I am selfish my whole life is designed to please myself by getting

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

a couple of people to help me please myself or at least construct a world that is consistent with my ideas of the world and to shut out or demean those whose views are discrepant, on and on, no stillness to be found no fulcrum that does not move no center, all this means that there must not be a center or rather we believe there is a center, perhaps in Him yes He is the center but we cannot actually locate him in the world he is beyond our sensing, hidden, only partially visible like the beginning and ending of time, surely they exist but can never be found like demarcating the beginning of life or zero or infinity, these endpoints that stabilize our world but can never be located there for they are elsewhere these stabilities, they are *elsewhere* and *elsewhen* and *elsewhy* and so that is what I have to say to you my love, the me you believe you are with, who anchors your life cannot really be located I am not really here I exist to be sure but elsewhere and elsewhen and elsewhy, one step ahead of you into the next moment and that makes me feel sad because I do love you and desire you and want to have you even though you partially elude me all the time which is why I say to you, if I had you from the beginning of time to the end of time, for now and forever the untuned note would sound

*Reflections – Ann Smith*

*When you say you want me to tell you something I think oh you are really going to ask and I tell myself that if you ever ask I will tell you, if you ask the right question maybe I can clarify for you, but you don't ask, you don't ask the right question because there is no question mark and it is so hard to know which question is the right question or even a question at all. You do go on about the shortness of the eternity we spend together our relationship that goes from then to now to elsewhen, you talk as you are wont to do about the richness of our crappy wonderful annoying blissful lacking full relationship, questioning whether our love making our time together is perfect. My heart aches from holding so much weight desire angst love always wanting more knowing I have enough. I want to tell you something it is perfect even if you left it would be perfect and even if you stay it is perfect. I tell myself we are complete in our incompleteness, and sometimes I feel the power of that and I am that wholeness. How do we stay in the moment rather than lean in, tell me, I'll write it down, I'll write it down on paper about this moment but then the moment would be gone wouldn't it, we carry ourselves and leave ourselves behind and follow each other and leave each other and follow ourselves and leave ourselves. Oh how I wish you could see me as*



## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*perfect as goddess like Durga who picks up the pieces by sucking the demons into her legs who carries Kali in her mind's eye and beckons her to lick up the blood, and then you could see that it is all perfect in its all-inclusive way in its wholeness and wouldn't be perfect without the imperfect. When you take the perfect from the perfect there is only perfect. When you take wholeness from wholeness there is only wholeness and the untuned note sounds, Om puurnnamadah puurnnamidam puurnmaat puurnnamudacyate puurnnashya puurnnamaadaaya puurnnamevavashisyate Om shaantih shaantih shaantih*

!

This is my dreaming, my life is, and my dreaming consoles me despite its being interrupted and smudged and adapted and I suppose I should be happy that I continue to dream as you dream as all of us dream these lives, imagining that they can be found in the world I know. I know all this would not be possible if the world were whole and complete and true and mine – no reaching for, no desiring no living and no suffering – I know that they all have told me this for years I just cannot tolerate struggling with it forever! I know all this, mystery that it remains

I know that the other side of the moon exists dark or not and that there is so much more of you too and one day I promise I will travel there I will reach the darkened side one day in fact this separation *is* my longing is the basis of my desire, gives rise to the tumble of my thoughts and the sway in my heart. There is no reason for any of this to be true or any of us to exist in the first place, perhaps there is a reason for all this but if so it is a mystery to me, unexplained, beyond, shrug of shoulder. Absence I can understand for it is the space left behind by the things I have lost, especially you, but *presence*...why? I think about asking each one of you to hold me tight, to declare your presence in spite of the mystery until all doubt is squeezed from me and if this fails then at least you will have muffled the wobble of the world with the warmth and presence of your arms your steadfast look your familiar smell, I'd love you for that, but I will not for we would be pretending, love though that it would be, pretending that you too were not seeking something so let me not burden you anymore I am done for now, I've said my piece and am not satisfied with it I missed the main point somehow I really wanted to get it across to you, I can see you don't fully comprehend my meaning I take responsibility for this I am left without you, you who are so close just an arm's length away I can see it in your eyes, I'm sorry, *I love you anyway*

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

### Developmental Transformations and Playing with the Unplayable

Cecilia Dintino, Navah Steiner, Ann Smith, and Kim Carlucci Galway<sup>1</sup>

#### *Authors' Certification of Brokenness*

*This paper and its authors have been collecting dust for years. Long ago the paper was rejected by the Arts in Psychotherapy. They wanted revisions, and revisions were made, but the paper was never resubmitted. What happened, you ask? In truth, life became unplayable for the authors. We have endured sickness, death, infertility, miscarriages and heartache. We have made major changes. One of us left New York for good. Another did analytic training. These challenges were easier, however, than putting this article in the mail. This paper was written before instability theory was even mentioned, and so is quite outdated, and – knowing now what real suffering is – touches only the surface of the issue of unplayability.*



Drama therapists often have difficulty sharing with other therapists the kinds of things we play with in our sessions. This is especially true for those of us who use Developmental Transformations as our guiding theory and method of treatment. The main work of the therapist in DvT is to establish and maintain a playspace, in which client and therapist improvise together. In a DvT session, client and therapist play with the salient clinical issues that emerge, including sexuality, death, abuse, violence, stigma, and/or psychosis. However, when discussing our work with colleagues or other mental health professionals, we are

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. Cecilia Dintino, Psy.D., RDT is Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychology at Columbia University; Adjunct Faculty in the Drama Therapy Program at New York University; Faculty, Institute for Developmental Transformations. [cdintino@verizon.net](mailto:cdintino@verizon.net) Navah Steiner, MA, RDT, LCAT is a psychotherapist at School of Visual Arts Counseling Services, New York; Director, Institute for Developmental Transformations, New York. [navahjs@gmail.com](mailto:navahjs@gmail.com) Ann Smith, Ph.D., RDT is a psychologist at Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Cambridge, MD. [annsmithphd@yahoo.com](mailto:annsmithphd@yahoo.com) Kimberly Carlucci Galway, M.A., RDT-BCT, LCAT is Director, Spotlight Theatre Group and in private practice, Westhampton Beach, NY. [kcgalloway@aol.com](mailto:kcgalloway@aol.com)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

often met with confused looks or even outraged stares. Quite often the response a Developmental Transformations drama therapist receives from others is: “You’re playing with what?”

It is as if there were an unspoken rule that we can only play with what is already playable, or better, palpable. Playing with topics that are unassimilated into our experience is quite another matter. Instead, these issues are suppressed, ignored, or pathologized. Yet, play is an act that includes accommodation, assimilation, internalization and transformation. Playing with initially unplayable ideas, wishes, and actions helps us feel they have become less of a threat to our integrity and existence. Playing with unplayable issues helps us to understand them more fully, control them more flexibly, and feel less overwhelmed by them. Play confronts the ramifications of our behaviors without danger. Through play we learn restraint.

Any method of therapy that engages in the rote re-enactment of horrors or trauma would be antithetical to healing. For DvT practitioners, re-enactment that really frightens, upsets or disengages a client is not a playful encounter. But we do not avoid dealing with issues that have the potential to frighten or upset our clients exactly because healing and growth take place by making the unplayable playable. By incorporating fearful experiences within play, the client can explore, confront, change and accept the previously intolerable.

This paper is an exploration of play’s definition, properties, value, and challenges in what can be construed as unplayable situations in Developmental Transformations therapy. It is an attempt to explain and clarify the benefits of making playable the unplayable as a method of drama therapy treatment.

### *The Unplayable*

Situations may be unplayable on three different levels: Cultural, institutional, and personal. Often, issues, feelings and situations are unplayable on all three levels. What is unplayable to the culture may constrain what is playable on the institutional and personal level. This paper will describe and discuss three Developmental Transformations case examples involving issues that are unplayable on all three levels. First, we will consider the theoretical and technical aspects of Developmental Transformations drama therapy, the properties of play, and the value of playing with the unplayable.

Developmental Transformations is a drama therapy method in which the drama therapist is a participant in dramatic improvisations with the client (Dintino

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

& Johnson, 1996; Galway, Hurd & Johnson, 2003; James, Forrester & Kim, 2005; Johnson, 1991, 1992, 2009; Johnson, Forrester, Dintino, James, & Schnee, 1996; Johnson, Smith, & James, 2002; Smith, 2000). The overriding premise of the method involves the maintenance of a playspace, which is defined as the mutual agreement and understanding between therapist and client that what is occurring in the improvisation is pretend. This agreement is maintained even when what is being played with is real. The playspace contract permits both therapist and client to place the real into a pretend frame, and thereby become malleable to play.

Within the playspace, the therapist and client improvise in an embodied encounter, in which the therapist offers herself as a playobject to the client. The therapist attempts to encounter the client within his/her world with a primary goal to make playable all that is available, in the service of opening to that which is not yet available. In Developmental Transformations we subscribe to the notion that development occurs through differentiation and integration that comprises a recursive process of perception, affect and bodily expression. Simply stated, the individual notices something new (emergent rather than existent), responds to it by letting it impact the emotional system, and then conveys a response via purposeful bodily expression. It is this process of allowing something new, emergent and not yet assimilated into the playspace that brings forth new potential, and changes the organism. This is transformation. The therapist encourages this recursive process and developmental expansion by offering emergent or divergent material within the play. Encouraging the client to follow their own emerging feeling states revives this recursive developmental process and expands the client's capacity to be in the moment.

However, opening to the emergent experience and allowing for this developmental recursive process is often challenging, requiring a release of preconceived notions of the world and oneself. It challenges the defensive system the client has built as protection against harm or humiliation, leading to greater flexibility and comfort with momentary unknowns. DvT opens participants to this process by letting go of dramatic structures and storylines, and letting the play transform by shifting attention to the discrepant elements that are always emerging.

This process often gets stuck, and participants may lose the ability to play and be playful, becoming trapped for a time in a state of fear. When it is the client's fear, the therapist assists by offering dramatic structures and playful possibilities. But sometimes the therapist gets stuck in the unplayable. Therefore,

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

an essential part of DvT training is to work on opening ourselves to playing in worlds that challenge our own perspectives.

### *Play*

*“To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. Our play fosters richness of response and adaptive flexibility. This is the evolutionary value of play – play makes us flexible.” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p.43).*

Much has been written about the healing value of dramatic play (Blatner & Blatner, 1988; Cattanach, 1992, 1994; Courtney, 1968; Huizinga, 1950; Jennings, 1995; Johnson, 1999; Jones, 1996; Landy, 1986; Nachmanovitch, 1990; Piaget, 1951, 1962; Singer & Singer, 1990; Slade & Wolf, 1994; Stern, 1985; Way, 1967; Winnicott, 1971). For the sake of this paper, we will focus on the key aspects of play that are integral to the healing properties of DvT: paradox, saliency, and aesthetic distance.

The existence of paradox is the driving engine behind Developmental Transformations’ use of play. Put simply, play requires the paradoxical intersection of real and not real. Paradox allows for otherness. Otherness is difference, newness, and change. Paradoxically, this newness emerges from the real and present moment. The playspace is necessary in order to risk giving over to the emergent, which is rooted in the present but reaches out to the future, the rising new moment.

The paradoxical property of the playspace is necessary to allow something new to exist, without the danger of real consequences. For example, in a game of peek-a-boo, a child plays at being left alone and then found. The play of peek-a-boo involves a dramatic act that is *not real*. It is a game that includes the excitement and anticipation of emergent possibilities. However, the experience is also real because it engages actual and immediately present bodily and emotional reactions. In fact, what the child experiences as the fun and engaging quality of peek-a-boo is the fact that it involves real physical and emotional reactions. Therefore, the physically experienced anticipation and joy of the surprise in peek-a-boo is the part of the game that the child commits to as real. She can experience the feelings of anticipation and joy specifically because the action is not real. For she is not really being left alone and then found. Still she plays with the experience fully and with bodily commitment. Therefore, play is where real

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

feelings are experienced - more fully and completely – in the moment, though the situation is not real.

In order for play to be truly engaging and satisfying (thereby involving our bodies, affects and cognitions) it must be meaningful and salient. Being left alone is a salient issue to the developing infant facing autonomy and separateness. Violence is salient to war veterans. Dying is salient to the elderly. Existing is salient to the schizophrenic. Humiliation and rejection is salient to the transgender teen. Engaged play always involves playing with issues that are salient and important. Anything else falls into compliance or acquiescence. Being forced to play with an issue one does not wish to play with, or is not interested in, results in the collapse of play in terms of spontaneity, flow, and paradox.

Other vital properties of play include catharsis and spontaneity. Catharsis and spontaneity represent physical and emotional states accompanying the fullness of the present moment and its emergent possibilities of being. However, catharsis and spontaneity are the products of freedom and do not occur when a person is overwhelmed with fear. As Robert Landy (1983, 1986) has eloquently articulated, catharsis and spontaneity in dramatic play require aesthetic distance (an inherent property of all play and drama). In aesthetic distance we are able to feel and think simultaneously (Landy, 1986). Aesthetic distance allows us to tolerate immediate states of being while allowing something new to emerge within and outside of our perception and experience. Extremely overdistant and underdistant states lead to a collapse of play (Landy, 1983).

In sum, play is the state of paradox necessary for the incorporation of new experiences and sensations. It is maintained by aesthetic distance, involves salient issues, and does not survive for long under conditions of compliance or acquiescence.

### *Why Play?*

DvT is a therapy that utilizes play as its primary technique, method and theory, and therefore is based on an understanding of play's purpose and function in the development of mental health. Play is sometimes joyful, humorous and exciting. Play is also a way of confronting difficult feelings, facing evil, and expressing anger or grief. Developing children play both lost children and the mothers who mourn them, murderers and their victims, the fearful and the fearless, babies, elderly and countless other roles and variations of each role.

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Through play we can experience our own pettiness and arrogance, and suffer humiliation and pride.

Those whose salient experiences and concerns lie within a realm of the unplayable have fewer opportunities to engage in the recursive developmental process that promotes flexible identifications and fosters transformation. Unable to play, they remain in painful, vicious cycles of encounter, persona, and being.

Play is the way that we develop into resilient, flexible, and adaptable persons. If we are able to play with an issue or a feeling, we are not overwhelmed by it. If we are able to play with something, we are also able to let it go, let it move us, change it, incorporate it, let it transform and let ourselves be transformed by it. We play not to laugh at or dilute our feelings and experiences of self and other, but rather to feel and experience more fully, without being annihilated by the cruel realities of life. We play in order to come closer to ourselves as human beings in all of our imperfect complexity.

*Example.* A drama therapist had been working with a Vietnam veteran for about one year. His misogynist attitudes and crass verbal put-downs were offensive and off-putting to the female drama therapist. In addition, the drama therapist knew of the client's violent history. Her ability to engage in the play was stymied due to feelings of disgust and fear that felt unplayable. However, eventually the therapist was able to play with some of the client's persistent criticisms and mocking of her. In one scene the therapist and the client met on a blind date. As the client laughed and deemed his date disappointing and ugly, the therapist was able to faithfully render the role of one who was ugly and deformed. This went on for some time with much energy and flow. Eventually, their encounter became more playful and the therapist began to tell the client that he was also a disappointment. The client playfully and broadly portrayed a smelly, retarded ogre with one-eye. The playfulness continued and eventually the therapist felt comfortable playing with her fear of the ogre/monster in the room. The client, as monster, began to chase the therapist around the room threatening to eat the therapist. Making the space for the fear and disgust arising within their real relationship and playing them over and over again, eventually gave way to transformation. The client was able to share his own experiences of humiliation and express feelings of horror and regret regarding his own violent behavior. The therapist was able to provide the space for this confession and felt genuine compassion for the client. Over the course of the sessions, the client was able to

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

move from projecting himself onto the therapist, to portraying himself as perpetrator and the disgusting one, to confronting himself as perpetrator and the disgusting one. He no longer needed to ward off the reality of his experiences and feelings. These were allowed to exist in the playspace created within the therapeutic encounter. The therapist, who had entered his world and made it playable for herself, was able to be there and provide the affection and forgiveness that her client needed in order to move on.

### *How Do We Know When We Are In Play?*

DvT uses the playspace as a primary therapeutic medium. How does the therapist determine if the participants are in a playspace? The therapist notices tangible signs of behavior that are often overlooked without training. In Developmental Transformations, we attend to two major signals that indicate whether or not the client is in the playspace: energy flow and discrepant behavior.

When play is aesthetically distanced, and hovering around salient issues, it is usually marked by an energy surge. The energy flow indicates that the recursive process is in place, allowing for the paradoxical existence of new, emerging experiences to enter the playspace. This flow of energy is not necessarily raucous or humorous (although it certainly may be at times of true release). Instead, flow is sometimes sustained between two people through an affective link such as silent tears, or silence that is filled with a mutual, bodily-felt understanding between therapist and client.

The mutual agreement between therapist and client that they are in play is also indicated by the presence of discrepant or contradictory behaviors, recognized by both parties. Some examples of such discrepant behaviors are: placing a mask on one's face in a manner that is tilted, revealing the face beneath; playing at being an elephant while letting the other person know it's not really an elephant by talking or using hands to represent the trunk; crying with grief while simultaneously miming someone playing hop scotch. The signal that one is immediately and emotionally involved and not overwhelmed is understood through these discrepant behaviors. Playful behavior purposefully reveals this discrepancy, which is understood by all involved in the play. This is unlike playful teasing and mocking where the intention is to be genuinely mean or insulting under the guise of play. Here the mutuality between the players is broken. The distinction between harmful activity and play lies in the presence of a



---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

mutual agreement between players about what is real and what is not real.

Discrepant behavior facilitates not only play but all cognitive, affective and interpersonal development. Daniel Stern (1985) asserts the necessity of purposeful misattunement in which a mother intuitively under-matches or over-matches an infant's expression, which serves to enhance the development of the autonomy and complexity of experience. Discrepant signals and behavior ignite the recursive developmental process of noticing, feeling, animating and accommodating to something new. The discrepant behavior, sound, role or movement is noticed because it is new. The new and old, or nonrepeating and repeating, elements must then be integrated into a more complex understanding of the world and self. In this way, play is able to increase the complexity and integration of one's inner and outer world.

### *The Importance of Play*

An inability to play is the hallmark of disorders such as autism and trauma; it rises in states of crisis and acute stages of many disorders; it is correlated with incidents of violence and acting out behavior. Lack of play turns erotic art into pornography, film noir into snuff films, fantasy into action. (Note: movies and TV are not true examples of play because they do not involve bodily encounter with others, are not mutual interactions, and cannot produce new or emergent experiences because what is seen proceeds on its own without responding to the person watching.)

We live today in an overdistanced culture. Computers and television are the primary media of our communication and encounter. Consequently, theatrical conventions have become more self-revelatory and underdistanced. Drama therapy in general and DvT in particular therefore find themselves enrolled in the service of balancing the wider culture's distanced, cognitive orientation by emphasizing the need to engage in the unplayable areas left on the margins. Thus DvT can be viewed as another form of a more underdistanced, embodied experience of encounter that is addressing the imbalance within the overdistanced play prominent within current culture. This marginality may in fact offer an opportunity for DvT in helping people engage with the emergent, tolerate differences, and develop greater capacity for restraint from real harm.

### Case 1

In this first case, the drama therapist uses DvT as a treatment for a

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

transgender young adult who is HIV positive. The drama therapist had been working as a caseworker with the client for six months. This is their fifth drama therapy session together. Some of the unplayable issues involved in this session include adolescence, HIV, sex, homosexuality, and transgender identity. Both personal and cultural stigma and avoidance of these issues impacted the play in this session. In this case, the therapist is able to personally play with such issues. She is able to tolerate and accommodate to individual diversity. In this case, the therapist is successful in creating a container and vehicle for her client to play with these unplayable issues.

*Session Description.* (The therapist, NJS, will use first person.) Samantha is a 20-year-old transgender female who was born male. She is HIV positive. Samantha is currently anxious about an upcoming visit from her father, with whom she has a very strained relationship and who has not seen her for years. Consequently, he has never seen her as a woman.

Samantha entered the playspace and started shaking her hands in the air. I said that she could shake out things that were brought in with her from the outside world. She nodded “yes” vigorously. Samantha and I both moved our hands and started pushing the stuff out. We ran to the side of the room and yelled for help, because the stuff was caving in. We attempted to hold it up. We ran about the room from side to side and tried to prevent the stuff from falling in on us. We tried to hold up the ceiling. We looked at each other with great intensity. I wondered, what it was that we were about to crumble under? Suddenly, breaking the intensity of the moment, Samantha looked out of the window and yelled to an imaginary person. I joined her, shouting, “You over there stop! Freeze!” Samantha took on the role of this person, and I accused her, “What are you doing here!” Samantha became somewhat challenging and refused to respond to my demands. I picked up on this. With an arrogant, authoritative manner, I accused her of being a prostitute, or even worse, a transvestite prostitute. There was much energy around this and Samantha immediately began to defend herself by claiming it had been her friends who participated in such criminal behavior. In the role of a policeman, I grabbed her and arrested her. Samantha became defiant and demanded a lawyer. I immediately transformed to the role of the lawyer. I told her that I couldn’t help her, she knew the law and she should change her ways. Samantha defiantly announced that she could do whatever she wanted. We then began to run around the room like defiant children yelling, “I can,” and “No you can’t,” over and over again. We then transformed to children on a

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

playground discussing the good and bad of being gay.

Samantha: (In child's voice.) My mommy says gay people are bad.

Therapist: (In child's voice.) Yes, they are disgusting. Yuck.

Samantha: They are dirty.

[I then became a mother asking her son if he had a girlfriend. Samantha, as little boy, claimed that she had a boyfriend. As the mother, I fell to the floor pretending to be shocked and disgusted. I screamed that I felt sick.]

Therapist: (In the role of mother.) Gay people are bad. I am going to throw up. This is making me so sick.

Samantha: (To mother, with much anger and emotion in voice.) Throw up and die why don't you.

Therapist: (Pretending to throw up very dramatically.) At least you're not one of those disgusting TRANSVESTITES!

Samantha: (Very confrontational.) Yes I am one!

Therapist: Oh my god. I am going to die. You are killing me.

Samantha: I am leaving you.

Therapist: (Begging on hands and knees.) No, please don't leave.

Samantha: I am going to my father's house. (She rang a doorbell, indicating that she had transformed the scene). Ding Dong.

Therapist: (In the role of the father and holding an imaginary beer bottle.) Come on in. Come sit with your old father.

Together we sat on the floor. Samantha asked where her father's wife was. She stated that she did not think his wife liked her. The energy was dropping. I (as therapist in the here and now) stated that something was making Samantha uncomfortable. Samantha agreed that she felt uncomfortable playing with issues related to her father. I playfully announced that we didn't have to stay here and could move on to somewhere else. Samantha announced that she would love to go to the Bahamas. Together we spread our arms and flew to the Bahamas. We played volleyball on the beach. But the energy dropped again. I went over to Samantha and whispered in her ear while pointing to the center of the room "something lingers there." Together we took on German-like accents and as two pseudo-Dr. Freuds, we discussed possible "dynamics with the father figure."

Therapist: I believe there is some avoidance.

Samantha: I think it became too real and the client shut down.

Therapist: (Impressed with Samantha's insight.) Hmmm. Very interesting indeed.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

You are quite observant and insightful. Well, what do you think we should do, Dr. Freud?

Samantha: I think we have to confront the father. (There was much playful energy at this point.)

Therapist: (Very broadly and playfully.) Okay, Okay. Ladies and Gentlemen. It is time to CONFRONT! Together we will reach up and bring down that which we must confront. First, Ladies and Gentleman, we will confront a piece of apple pie and we will not eat it!

[We reached up and with a humming sound brought down a piece of delicious and tempting apple pie. We played for some time at wanting it and being tempted to eat it. Eventually we broke down and tasted it. Energy was dropping again.]

Therapist: Now for the showstopper! We will confront the FATHER! (With another humming sound we pulled down the father.)

Therapist: (Sensing tension and taking the lead.) You were never there for Samantha!

Samantha: Your wife was mean to me!

Therapist: You did not defend and protect your child.

Samantha: Yeah! And you beat my mother when I was a child. You worked and drank all the time.

Therapist: (Stepping into the role of the father.) I screwed up. I was a terrible father.

[Looking tense, Samantha began to pace around the room. She did not look at me. I left the role of the father and joined in the pacing. I handed Samantha a microphone (a distancing image used in past sessions) and asked for her comments about the session.]

Samantha: Yes, I do believe it is very hard to confront one's parents. But children should be able to confront their parents.

Therapist: So you heard it, Ladies and Gentlemen, sometimes it is necessary but often it is difficult to confront your feelings about your parents and your past. We will be back next week, same time, and same station. Thank you for joining us today. Take a minute (indicating the end of the session).

*Discussion.* Samantha periodically loses the playspace during moments of encounter with her feelings of shame and disgust, and feelings about the father. Generally, she is efficient in changing/transforming her role and the scenes.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

Occasionally, however, when things seem too real, she becomes overwhelmed and therefore is unable to play.

The therapist provides bracketing and other theatrical devices (assuming foreign accents, giving character names, using microphones, confronting apple pies) in order to re-establish the playspace. These techniques serve as signals to Samantha that she and the therapist are in play. The discrepant cues are understood by Samantha as indicators that even though she is dealing with real, painful feelings and issues, she does not have to be really hurt or be abused in the session.

The therapist offers the play in the service of helping her client experience, make space for, and tolerate her feelings of humiliation, shame and rage. For Samantha, being close to these feelings requires an immense playspace. It also requires the client's capacity to let go. Resistance to engagement in drama therapy not only derives from discomfort with the art form, but more centrally with the challenge of loosening one's hold on the other, in order to allow room to play with and ultimately transform one's relationship to oneself and others. Transformation of real behavior into pretend behavior involves a restructuring of internalization, and in some cases may feel to a client like a total upset of her definition and story of self and other. Moving from real to pretend requires letting go of the concreteness of reality. Because this is threatening, and at present possibly fragmenting to this client, the therapist pulls back, and changes the focus and therapeutic goal from confrontation of the father to maintaining the playspace. She does this because it is clear that when she pushes, the client attempts to be compliant, but consistently the play collapses. Because the therapist is able to keep the play alive, her client gains some control over threatening and possibly fragmenting thoughts and feelings. This then allows her to begin to sort out some of the confusing messages and difficult issues she confronts as a transgender youth with HIV.

### Case 2

The second case will consider a drama therapist's work with a group of frail elderly in a nursing home setting. The therapist had been working at the nursing home for three years and meeting with this particular group for two years. Our current culture has difficulty playing with death and physical and material loss. We are a youth-oriented, image-oriented, and materialistic society that shuns images of the nursing home. We have literally split the elderly off from

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

mainstream society and community involvement. Expressions of pain or anxiety by nursing home residents are more likely to be responded to with medication than listening.

Yet we all struggle to accept the finite aspect of life. Two days prior to this session, the therapist lost her grandfather. Because she was experiencing grief on a personal level, the therapist had initial resistance to facilitating this group. She feared losing herself in her own feelings of sadness and/or being unable to play or maintain the playspace for her clients who represented what she had just lost.

*Session Description.* (The therapist, AGS, will use first person.) After some initial sound and movement warm up, images and sounds of cackling witches surfaced. I recalled that these images were prominent in last week's session, when the group members became witches and made a stew out of ghastly things such as their own failing body parts. I pondered the meaning of this image. Thoughts of being old, craggy, with warts and all, came to mind. Also, the possibility of black magic and the wisdom that comes of old age.

Therapist: Here we are again as witches. This happened last week too.

Justine: We need a house to haunt.

Therapist: How can we haunt the house?

We thought out loud about many different ways to haunt the house. We talked about ghosts and spider webs. We acted these images out. We were dead, no longer part of the living. We were here to haunt others, burden others and scare others. We were frightening and frightening to look at. We haunted the young. We haunted ourselves.

One of the group members mentioned the image of Dracula. I went to the middle of the circle and took on the persona of Dracula. I acted it out for them. The group members cued me as to my persona's characteristics. They told me that I had long teeth. They said that I had no teeth. I took on the physical portrayal of the impotent ghoul. I was filled with the image of a vampire who could no longer suck blood. I felt like a sexual being that no longer touched or was touched. A free spirit stuck in a shackled body. I had a will to control, but no autonomy.

There was lots of laughter, as I acted out Dracula with no teeth. They continued to offer cues, now stating that I was a bat, a blind bat, taking away yet another of my senses. Now I was toothless and blind, groping my way helplessly around the room, asking for help from the group members. Some of the group

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

members responded to my neediness by laughing at me, others by pulling back when I reached for them, some by trying to guide me. There was much richness of affect and meaning in the room. The group members were fully engaged.

The group members began clapping while they laughed. The clapping turned to a rhythm.

Justine: Sounds like an old horse.

Walter: A bunch of horses.

[I took on the role of an old horse.]

Therapist: (While galloping in the center of the room and then faithfully rendering the aging aspect of the horse.) Oy, my back hurts.

Walter: You don't have a saddle.

Bob: (Who had expressive aphasia and has difficulty speaking,) NO. . . No. . .  
No. . . teeth!!! (There was much laughter, as I became a horse with no teeth.)

Armando: You have nothing in the world. I am like you.

Sally: You have a limp.

I faithfully rendered all of their commands. I was filled with feelings of loss, loss of body, senses, family and friends. I thought of my grandfather and my own personal loss. I was struck by the feeling of having something in common with them. I had never felt this so poignantly before. I thought of the phrase "rites of passage" and I was not so sure that I liked it.

Milty, Bob and Justine began singing: "The old gray mare she ain't what she used to be." Everyone joined in. There was laughter. I replied, "No, I'm not what I used to be. Are you what you used to be?"

I went to each member of the group. One at a time they answered, "no." I approached Manuel (a very guarded, proud man who often refuses drama group and all groups in general). Manuel looked me in the eye and said, "No, Miss, I am not what I am used to be," with much feeling and meaning. There fell a full silence upon the room.

As the old gray mare, I announced that I felt in good company with the group. I said that I felt at home. The group members supplied me with reassurance. They began to laugh again, offering me an apple that I couldn't chew. I announced that I lost my teeth in this apple. Suddenly, Bob pulled out his own actual false teeth and offered them to me. There was more uproarious laughter in the room. The laughter faded to a silence. The room felt full. There was buoyancy about us, as if we were floating in a special place together, as if no

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

one wished to break the spell that we had cast on each other. There seemed to be more to cover. They didn't want to end it yet. There was still a feeling of anticipation. I was aware that the group needed to end soon.

The group energy seemed to float as we enjoyed our special place together. The group members began to talk about their actual losses. Milty mentioned his eyesight. Another group member announced that there was not much left for him. Another stated that he still had humor and fun with others. They all acknowledged that it felt good to laugh and to be in this group together. There was a feeling of love in the room. I closed the group by having us all hold hands and breathe together. The group members left the room still laughing and interacting with each other.

*Discussion.* In this case, the therapist allows herself to be the subject and container of the losses and humiliations that her residents suffer silently. She becomes their playobject. They are free to watch her suffer. At the same time she provides enough discrepancy that they see they are not really killing or hurting her. The therapist's expansion of the playspace is also motivated by her own need to distance herself (through broad theatrical play) from the realities of being with the elderly, since she suffers from the recent loss of her grandfather. The therapist successfully creates enough playspace for herself and for the residents. It is because the playspace is so full and strong that they are able to say - this is me!! The paradox is fully realized, creating a space for their real feelings. They can explore their real feelings because they are so clearly not real in the moment. And by being in the real and present state of acknowledging their losses they are able to notice and experience the emerging hope and love between them as members of humanity, not merely nursing home residents.

### Case 3

In this third case, the therapist presents her work of three years, playing with a formerly homeless man with schizophrenia, who was ostracized from society – literally having been driven out to live in the streets. He was unable to identify and express his emotions and thoughts - and was therefore deemed delusional and bizarre. We are often frightened of those whose ontological world is so far from our own. We sometimes see them as less than human and treat them accordingly. We recoil at the thought of being in a playspace with them. We fear their inability to recognize the discrepancy between the real and not real – the very premise of play and the signature deficit in psychosis.



## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

*Session Description.* (The therapist, KCG, will use first person.) We began with movement. I mirrored his movements and he mirrored mine. An airplane-like movement arose, and we spun close to each other, silently. All of a sudden it was as if we were getting ready to dive, or jump. I asked if he had his parachute. We put on our parachutes and jumped, pulling the cords to release the chutes. We floated down for a while. He stopped, rather abruptly, and became rigid. I mirrored him. He did his “attention” and “at ease” poses (rigid, military-like poses that he often made during our sessions), which I joined.

We did this several times. I then stayed with the “attention” pose, rigid, my legs together, arms pressed to my sides. “I’m stuck,” I said. He came over to me and put his hands on my shoulders, first trying to loosen me up by massaging the tops of my shoulders. When this did not work, he began to steer me across the room, moving my back down, up, to the side. He proclaimed me a robot, so I began talking in a robotic voice. He asked, “What planet are you from?” I replied, in a monotone voice, “Delbark.” I asked him what planet he was from. He said “Mars.” He was a Martian, he explained, not a robot.

He then asked if I had ever been to Krypton. I said no. He said Superman was from there, and asked if I knew if he could die from the Kryptonite. I said I didn’t know. He said although he had heard of Krypton, he had never been there. We decided to go to Krypton, and he followed me there, stepping forward, to the right, forward again, to the right, and forward one last time. We turned to the right and we were on Krypton. We were faced with Kryptonite. We decided to destroy it, which we did. I followed his lead. After destroying the Kryptonite, we called for Superman. Superman could come down because the Kryptonite was no longer a danger, he explained. I said I’d love to have Superman come because maybe he could help me; I was tired of being a robot, I wanted to be human. He said he, too, wanted to be human. After a moment of silent impasse, he said that we were not human but that we are monsters. We acted as monsters and walked about the room. I was filled up with sadness, so much that tears sprung to my eyes as I said I did not want to be a monster anymore. I asked if he thought Superman could help us?

All of a sudden he began talking into his wrist, as if a special walkie-talkie watch. He was Superman, checking in. He said he could not come because the Kryptonite was too dangerous. I told him we had destroyed it, and he said he was on his way. He arrived and I told him of our dilemma. He said he could make me human, but I would be destroyed. I said, “So the only way for me to become

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

human is to be destroyed? To die?” “Yes,” he said. I paused. Then I thanked him for his advice. He flew off.

At one point I lifted my chin up. All of a sudden, he acted on an image of me being royalty, and bowed. “Your Majesty,” he said. I asked him to fix my crown, which he did. He said I was wearing a maroon velvet dress. He was in a tuxedo, and was serving sandwiches to the entire Kingdom. “For the bride and groom,” he said. I began to hum, “Here comes the bride,” as I took his arm. He put his arm around me and we marched forward in a procession. He reached his hands out in front of him, and I mirrored him.

“Do you take this woman to be your loyal wife?” he asked. I replied, “Do you?” and he said, “yes.” He then asked, “Do you take this man to be your lawful husband?” I said “yes,” and we are married and faced each other. “We are husband and wife,” I said. “Yes,” he replied, smiling, “We will go to the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve.” We headed there, and there was some talk of the forbidden apple. I promised him I would not eat it, that I will stay with him forever. I began to pull back a bit, picking up on something else. He said, “If you leave, if you disappear, and I do not see you ever again...”

I reached out my hand to him, “if I disappear,” I said twice, letting my voice fade as I slowly began to fold into the ground. He reached for his chest. “You are part of me,” he said, “You were God’s gift to me.” He seemed to be saying that even if I was not there, he had taken a part of me inside. I repeated what he said, coming towards him. He said, “The tree of life,” and we became trees, swaying in the wind, our branches intertwined via our arms.

We stopped and he clenched his fist. I mirrored this posture, and he slowly unclenched his fist and then made one again. We did this several times and began to move our bodies. He asked if he was alive. Then I touched his shoulders, head, and face, to make sure he was alive. He said he was, he “survives.” There was much energy during this. Then, he said he felt different, like a different person, new, changed. He wanted me to go into the ocean with him, to swim, and to be cleansed. We did so, swooshing around the room. We came to a rest and shook it out. The session ended there.

*Discussion.* The therapist is working on making a playspace for two people from different ontological realms, two different takes on reality, two different states of embodiment, to meet and have an encounter. In this way her client can reclaim his humanity and reconnect to his emerging sense of being in the world. She provides a rich, sensory context for her client to enter the

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

playspace. She uses concrete symbolization such as being a robot, free falling with a parachute, encountering Krypton and forsaking forbidden apples to explore experiences of longing, danger, fear, disembodiment and betrayal. Together, they become a tree of life, and through embodied touch, play with connecting and intertwining. It is a kinesthetically embodied image, which helps the client to enter the playspace and opens a door to an encounter with the therapist. While he has great difficulty with abstract concepts such as love and relationships, he is able to engage his emotional life through their physical play. In the play, he is allowed to both move towards and away from levels of comfort in his encounter with the therapist. In this way he ventures towards an intimacy and self-integrity that he has not known as an adult man. The client transcends the rigidity and stereotypical behaviors common to his diagnosis in these moments; in play he explores his fears, hopes, and wishes simply and poignantly in connection with another human being. While this does not cure his schizophrenia, it offers him a sense of hope and humanity in a way that honors his own sense of being.

### *Conclusion*

Play is the way in which we meet ourselves, welcome others, develop and grow emotionally, cognitively, and socially. In this way, play may provide a foundation for enhancing civilization and enlightenment. Still, the challenge remains to justify play as delivering therapeutic value when clients bring issues and experiences that are unplayable. In fact, re-enactment of unplayable issues, without the playspace as we define it, may be re-traumatizing and antithetical to healing. We postulate the following justifications for play as therapy, especially when play seems unplayable.

- Play allows for development and change through the recursive process of taking in and letting oneself be affected by something new.
- Because play occurs within a paradoxical space of real and not real (the playspace) the participants are allowed the opportunity to feel deeply and yet control frightening and threatening aspects of themselves.
- Play expands participants' capacities as emerging and spontaneous individuals.
- Playing with someone means entering into another's world and sharing experiences that define our humanity. Individuals who live in unplayable worlds have fewer opportunities to have their worlds entered and shared, and therefore have fewer opportunities to grow and expand themselves.

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

We as drama therapists and especially as DvT therapists have a duty to offer ourselves to our clients as playobjects in the service of their personal developmental growth. Through this forthright act, we can transform the unplayable into the playable.

### References

- Blatner, A. & Blatner, A. (1988). *The art of play: Helping adults reclaim imagination and spontaneity*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Cattanach, A. (1992). *Play therapy with abused children*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Dintino, C., & Johnson, D. (1996). Playing with the perpetrator: Gender dynamics in developmental drama therapy. In S. Jennings (Ed.), *Drama therapy: Theory and practice, vol. 3*, (pp. 205-220). London: Routledge.
- Emunah, R. (1994). *Acting for real: Drama therapy process, technique, and performance*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Huizinga, J. (1955). *Homo ludens: a study of the play element in culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Galway, K., Hurd, K., & Johnson, D. (2003). Developmental transformations in group therapy with homeless people with a mental illness. In D. Wiener & L. Oxford (Eds.), *Action therapy with families and groups*, (pp. 135 -162). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Jennings, S. (1993). *Introduction to dramatherapy*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Johnson, D. (2009). Developmental transformations: Toward the body as presence. In D. Johnson & R. Emunah (Eds.), *Current approaches to drama therapy*, (pp. 89-116). Charles Thomas Publishers.
- Johnson, D. (1999). *Essays on the creative arts therapies: Imaging the birth of a profession*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publishers.
- Johnson, D. (1991). The theory and technique of transformations in drama therapy. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 18, 285-300.
- Johnson, D. (1992). The drama therapist in role. In S. Jennings (Ed.), *Drama therapy: Theory and practice, vol. 2*, (pp. 112-136). London: Routledge.
- Johnson, D., Forrester, A., Dintino, C., James, M., & Schnee, G. (1996). Towards a poor drama therapy. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 23, 293-308.
- Johnson, D., Smith, A., & James, M. (2003). Developmental transformations in

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

- group therapy with the elderly. In C. Schaefer (Ed.), *Play therapy with adults*, (pp. 78-106). New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Jones, P. (1996). *Drama as therapy: Theatre as living*. London: Routledge.
- Landy, R. (1983). The use of distancing in drama therapy. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 10, 175-185.
- Landy, R. (1986). *Drama therapy, concepts and practices*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishers.
- Moustakas, C. (1953). *Children in play therapy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Nachamanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play: The power of improvisation in life and the arts*. Los Angeles: Tarcher.
- Piaget, J. (1951). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. New York: Norton.
- Singer, D.G., & Singer, J.L. (1990). *The house of make believe: Play and the developing imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Slade, A., & Wolf, D.P. (Eds). (1994). *Children at play: Clinical and developmental approaches to meaning and representation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stern, D. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant*. New York: Basic Books.
- Way, B. (1967). *Development through drama*. London: Humanities.
- Winnicott, D. (1971). *Playing and reality*. New York: Basic Books.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

Commentary on

“Developmental Transformations and Playing with the Unplayable”

Jason D. Butler<sup>1</sup>

As a DvT playor the unplayable is often something I take for granted in my work. I talk about it frequently, I teach it, I encourage my clients and students to face and negotiate the unplayable - but I don't spend much time examining and experiencing the various manifestations of the unplayable in my play. Dintino, Steiner, Smith and Galway have given us an opportunity to reengage with the idea and to begin a closer examination of the unplayable and its role in DvT.

Sometimes we bump into our unplayable, solid and impenetrable, “you shall not pass” -- the unplayable, experienced as unplayable. Other times, we expertly swerve around it, our subconscious effortlessly gliding around what might be difficult or unpalatable, maintaining the illusion of repeating elements, all is the same, all is safe, all is known, all appears playable. Perhaps, on an odd occasion, we might catch a glimpse, a blip in the rearview mirror, of something, a fleeting moment in the periphery, fading before it has even manifest. Our relationship to the unplayable is complex.

Perhaps there are at least two layers of play: the play of comfort, of things that are already playable and palpable, and then the play of discomfort, the play that's clunky, that's scary, unpalatable and new. I can see potential reflections of my own unplayable, or rather, uncomfortable play, in each of the case studies presented by Dintino et al. I see my own relationship to shame, gender and transgenderism, my own experience of mortality, watching people close to me age, and my own relationship to sanity, home and isolation. Were I to work with the individuals presented here, I could lean in two different directions: I could take the path of least resistance and play where my comfort is – engaging with my own repetitions around these themes in ways that would still probably be helpful for the clients but that would be safe for me – or I could play at the edge of my

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. Jason Butler, Ph.D., RDT-BCT is Director, Montreal DvT Institute; Faculty, Concordia University, Montreal, CA. [jasondbutler@yahoo.com](mailto:jasondbutler@yahoo.com)

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

discomfort and continue challenging my own playspace in the presence of my clients. True, this will raise questions of ethics and responsibility, but these questions have always been present. In fact, one of my favorite DvT chapters is “Playing with the Perpetrator: Gender Dynamics in Developmental Drama Therapy” by Dintino and Johnson (1997) that opens up much about this idea.

What is the responsibility of the DvT player in relationship to his or her own playspace? In each case above, Dintino et al. reflect the clients’ unplayable issues, but also point toward the unplayable, or uncomfortable play of the therapist. Entering the paradox, finding the saliency and utilizing the aesthetic distance puts us into a position to affect change in our clients. But is there also benefit in the player’s continual process of personal challenge and discomfort using the same tools? At the International DvT Conference in Maastricht in 2014, Marc Willemsen and I explored this topic in our workshop, “The Titanic and the Art of Going Down.” If DvT ideas and concepts regarding power, reversibility and play are at our core, then it stands to reason that the ideas of unplayability and expansion of playspace will continue, perpetually, to apply to both player and player (for are we ever exclusively one or the other?).

With all parties engaged in a sincere process of exploration it seems the potential for growth increases. While it is only alluded to in this article, the transformation expressed by the players in the case examples above cannot have been small or insignificant, especially in the moments where all involved took steps into the new, uncomfortable places. Their examples can serve as reminders of the transactional nature of DvT and the potential within a truly mutual encounter.

On an even larger scale, the question mentioned by Dintino et al. at the beginning of the article, “You’re playing with *what?*” seems more relevant now than ever as it points to the unplayable that exists beyond the personal level, within institutions and cultures. With recent terrorist attacks in France and the ever-present tensions of religion, belief, conviction and politics fueling real violence and harm, the idea of playing with the unplayable – unlocking the rigidity of ideas in order to enter a space of dialogue and transformation – seems more important than ever. As the authors eloquently state, “We play not to laugh at or dilute our feelings and experiences of self and other, but rather to feel and experience fully, without being annihilated by the cruel realities of life. We play in order to come closer to ourselves as human beings in all of our imperfect complexity.”

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Is it too grandiose to suggest we have an obligation to play? A responsibility to engage with our own discomfort and unplayability within embodied encounters in the playspace in order to help ourselves, our clients and the ailing world stay in touch with our humanity?

Dintino, C., & Johnson, D. R. (1997). Playing with the perpetrator: Gender dynamics in developmental drama therapy. In S. Jennings (Ed.), *Drama therapy: Theory and practice* 3, (pp. 205–220). New York, NY: Routledge.



### Tending to the Supervisory Relationship Through Developmental Transformations

Robert Miller, Sofia Vgenopoulou, and David Read Johnson<sup>1</sup>

#### *Authors' Certification of Brokenness*

*This article was written 20 years ago and was promptly rejected by the Arts in Psychotherapy. It was then passed around, lost, found again, revised because DvT theory had changed, and finally submitted again to Arts in Psychotherapy, which asked for major revisions. The reviewers accurately saw that this article is really two articles: one that discusses supervisory dynamics in the creative arts therapies in general; and another that demonstrates the dynamics of DvT supervision and implicitly suggests it is superior to other forms of supervision. We found no way to repair this.*



Psychotherapy disciplines have established the supervisory relationship as the primary learning alliance for growth and continued efficacy of psychotherapeutic practice. Supervisory relationships influence the manner in which a psychotherapist will establish therapeutic relationships (Karon, 1990). To promote the growth of drama therapy as a profession it is important to understand the specific challenges of consolidating a professional identity as a drama therapist. The supervisory relationship is a central component of this process. In this paper we will focus on the challenges to the establishment of a secure supervisory relationship and then illustrate how Developmental Transformations can facilitate the achievement of that goal.

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. Robert Miller II, Ph.D. is Director, Center for Parenting and Child Consultation, Hoboken, NJ. [miller50@mac.com](mailto:miller50@mac.com) Sofia Vgenopoulou, MD is a child psychiatrist, Athens, GR. [costas-sofia@usa.net](mailto:costas-sofia@usa.net) David Read Johnson, Ph.D., RDT-BCT is Director, Institute for Developmental Transformations; Co-Director, Post Traumatic Stress Center, New Haven, CT; Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine. [ptsdcenter@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ptsdcenter@sbcglobal.net)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

The primary context for the internal consolidation of a secure identity as a psychotherapist is the one-to-one personal transmission of learning between an individual supervisor and student. Research demonstrates that through the process of internalization the student develops a model of functional authority and a secure professional identity (Geller, 1987; Irwin, 1986; Orlinsky & Geller, 1991).

Research on mentoring relationships strongly suggests that the most effective consolidation of professional identity occurs when the student is supervised by a person in the same profession and orientation, though additional supervision from supervisors of diverse backgrounds and perspectives is valuable (Johnson, 1999; Levinson, 1978).

Supervisory support for the drama therapy student in the professional setting means providing supervision, drama therapy, training, mentoring, and job advancement. Careful attention to individual supervisory relationships in the professional setting will benefit not only the student and supervisor directly, but will ensure the growth of the drama therapy profession (Johnson, 1984; Jones & Dokter, 2008). Two-year graduate school training prepares the student to practice drama therapy. Postgraduate practice and supervision over an extended period of time allows the student to consolidate an identity as a professional drama therapist. Unfortunately, professional norms concerning the supervisory relationship have not been sufficiently established.

A 1995 survey of members of the National Association for Drama Therapy documented that few graduates identified having supervisors who actually practice drama therapy. Compared with other psychotherapy disciplines that encourage the student to experience psychotherapy in their own discipline, few drama therapy students sought out drama therapy as their primary therapeutic experience. Publications in our professional journals and presentations at professional conferences were authored primarily by one person, rather than co-authored by mentor and mentees. There existed a not insignificant postgraduate dropout rate (giving up drama therapy practice or changing professions), explaining the modest overall growth in the membership of the drama therapy association since its founding in 1979. Though there is evidence that these trends have improved in the 19 years since the original survey, the importance of sustained supervisory relationships for beginning drama therapists cannot be overestimated.

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Three specific challenges for the supervisory relationship are the: 1) intrinsic power differential, 2) process of evaluation, and 3) management of defenses for internalized shame.

### *The Power Discourse*

The supervisory relationship is a power differential based on levels of experience. This power differential may be denied or avoided through mutually supported defensive interactions. Supervisory relationships that evolve into peer-like arrangements with little evaluation or constructive criticism, or are conducted in a climate of pseudo-intimacy erode the authentic foundation for interaction between the student and the supervisor. Avoidance of power issues may invalidate the whole learning experience.

Supervisors need to inquire into a student's learning history to better provide new and optimal experiences to further growth. However, this is not to be confused with sharing intimate personal information. The guiding principle is to determine whether sharing of personal experience will be in the service of the student's learning, rather than in the service of the supervisor's intimacy needs.

Hypercritical supervisors tend to stimulate fear, shame, and insecurity in the student. Emotionally unavailable supervisors tend to stimulate anger, or feelings of abandonment. Critical, emotionally distant, or seductive styles in supervision will pass on poor models for leadership to younger generations of drama therapists. The supervisory style that is both influential and emotionally available is optimal for developing competence and confidence in the student.

### *Evaluation*

One essential task of the supervisory relationship is evaluation of the student's growth. The drama therapy supervisor makes real (not just imagined) evaluations that will affect the student's academic grade (graduate level), professional reputation (postgraduate level) and overall competency. Evaluation impacts on the self-esteem of the student. Drama therapy students should be able to enter into a relationship with an experienced drama therapist and tolerate the process of evaluation in the service of growth. This is often a challenging task for the student and supervisor.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

### *Internalized Shame*

The intimacy that develops in supervision stimulates previously internalized schemas based on attachment experiences with parents, teachers, and other authorities. Internalized schemas may color perceptions of the drama therapy supervisor and guide the student's behavior in different ways (Bowlby, 1980; Geller, 1987; Singer & Salovey, 1991).

Students with internalized schemas of primarily positive learning experiences are likely to respond to supervision with enthusiasm, productivity, seriousness, and respect. However, some students may respond to the intimacy that develops in the supervisory relationship with anxiety. These students may evidence a constricted or rigid style of relating to their supervisor. If there was an abusive relationship in the student's past they might covertly expect the supervisor to be seductive or emotionally unavailable, and therefore the student may avoid entering into the learning relationship. The student may covertly recruit (through subtle and not so subtle behaviors) the supervisor to play that part from the past in their present relationship.

Intense emotional reactions and avoidance of the supervisor may be evidence that shame-based dynamics are influencing the learning process. Shame-based dynamics active in the student may be evidenced by 1) a lack of pleasure in drama therapy practice, 2) denigration of drama therapy practice, 3) denigration of the self or others, 4) confusion and inhibition, 5) intolerance of other professional disciplines, 6) chronic anger and difficulty with authority figures, 7) grandiosity, or 8) a sense of entitlement.

The student who was required to take on parental roles early in their life may have missed the opportunity for the gradual relinquishment of childhood concerns. The parentified student may have developed a surface persona of competency and yet feel fraudulent in their self-identity. Their persona is often fragile and may break down with even mild criticism or feedback. To fully engage in the process of self-growth requires tolerance of these challenges to one's self-esteem, even for the most secure of students.

Internalized shame may make it difficult for some students to consolidate a functional authoritative role in the clinical setting. Evidence for this difficulty may emerge as passivity in the student, insecurity, inability to set limits on abusive behavior by clients, or over-identification with client needs.

### *Drama Therapy Methods in the Supervisory Relationship*

---

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

The efficacy of using drama therapy methods in supervisory relationships has been established in the education of drama therapists (Emunah, 1989; Jones & Dokter, 2008; Landy, 1982), but is not often described in detail. There is no basis for restricting supervisory communication to purely verbal exchanges. Embodied forms of supervision have also been explored in the field of dance movement psychotherapy (Meekums, 2006; Panhofer et al., 2011; Payne, 2008).

### Case Study

In this paper, we will provide a case study of the use of drama therapy in the supervisory relationship, in this case, Developmental Transformations (DvT). DvT is an improvisational drama therapy method that allows for the playful working through of evoked internalized working models of power and intimacy relationships (Johnson, 2009). While there is not room in this paper for a full description of this form of drama therapy, it is important to highlight certain aspects of this method that relate directly to the issues of power and intimacy within the supervisory relationship. (For a theoretical explanation see Johnson, 2009; Johnson, Forrester, Dintino, James, & Schnee, 1996).

What does it mean to improvise with your supervisor, and how might this impact on the student's learning? Working schemas when experienced in traditional didactic supervision tend to remain indirect, emotionally intense, and influence behavior covertly. DvT in supervision can bring schemas of relationship into the open. Playful engagement of internalized schemas of past negative learning experiences can ameliorate the painful effects of internalized shame. New effective models of power-sharing can guide the student in the creation of future therapeutic and professional relationships. Finally, the student is given direct access to the supervisor's application of drama therapy methods, which provides a strong modeling effect for the student.

The practice of DvT requires that the supervisor be available to the student as a living playobject. The supervisor does not guide the student through dramatic exercises or lead the student through experiences using projective techniques. The supervisor is emotionally present within the improvisational play and available to the scrutiny and the evaluation of the student. Both the supervisor and the student participate in the activity from within the playspace. The playspace is an embodied, improvisational and imaginative encounter between the supervisor and student. Their agreement is to improvise together in a flow of images, thoughts, feelings, roles, gestures, movements, impulses, and silences. This provides the

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

student an opportunity to interact with the supervisor in a zone of free play. The condition of the playspace provides the student with a transitional realm for the revision of internalized schemas through improvisational play and the deconstruction of rigid relational patterns (Derrida, 1978; Johnson et al., 1996; Nachmanovich, 1990). Within this process, dynamics of power differential, evaluation, and shame can be easily accessed and worked through.

The supervisor in the training session attempts to embody the improvisational flow (stream of consciousness) with the student. The supervisor follows the student's behavioral cues and attempts to engage the student's imaginative world. The supervisor attempts to a) faithfully render and b) join with the actions, images, and roles that the student wants to explore (Johnson, 1991). The student is invited to comment (through verbal processing during the play) on any aspect of the ongoing improvisation. Inhibitions in the student's freedom to play can be noticed by the supervisor and worked through. These inhibitions or impasses may be evidence of negative internalized schemas of power relationships.

The following session is taken from a supervisory relationship in the beginning stages. The developing intimacy in this supervisory relationship stimulated positive internalized schemas in the student related to parents, teachers, and her marital relationship. Affective states related to the current supervisory relationship were also encountered in the play. The supervisor also communicated his internalized schemas of his past positive supervisory experiences during the play. In this session, the power differential between this supervisor and student is atypical in the sense that the student, while less experienced in drama therapy, is a medical doctor with higher social status than her supervisor.

The present example is a training session that occurred during the student's (Sofia Vgenopolou) graduate internship at the Veterans Administration Medical Center. She is in her late twenties, married, and is a medical doctor. The supervisor in this session is a single male drama therapist (Robert Miller) in his late thirties.

This is the third session, three weeks into the student's internship. This session took place after the supervisor returned from vacation during which the student managed the patient drama therapy group alone. The student was evaluated by the supervisor, staff and patients at the medical center as having functioned successfully in the absence of the supervisor. This session was the first meeting between the supervisor and the student since his returning from vacation.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

The session was audiotaped and later transcribed. The supervisor and student were each asked to write personal reflections of the session, without knowledge of the other's reflections. These reflections, revealed in the indented commentary, were written after the end of the internship. Commentary in brackets [ ] are descriptions of actions that took place during the session.

[The supervisor and the student enter the room and spend a few minutes physically stretching, and warming up their voices. The two begin to move around the room at random, eventually developing punching and swinging movements. Sounds of growls and hissing are added. The movements transform to the image of wind blowing. The two are blown around the room by forceful winds. Sofia then transforms the scene by beginning to move in a heavy, slow, burdened manner, which Robert joins and follows.]

*Robert: You seem to be enjoying your abandon, I can also see you are burdened by something.*

*Sofia: Oh...I just can't do this.... I feel so heavy, so much a stranger, I want something completely different than this... I want to start talking and never stop, and at the same time I am afraid to utter a single word for fear it will reveal too much...I feel so transparent.*

[She adds facial expressions that are sad and directed to the supervisor. She makes sounds of clicks, hissing, and growling that develop into wringing and punching movements toward the supervisor]

*Robert: Are you angry with me because I was on vacation, for leaving you alone?*

[Both begin to laugh as they embody the slow wringing movements with growling sounds. She begins to laugh harder, and stumbles on a piece of carpet, which makes her laugh even more. He imitates this accident and continues to follow her lead by intensifying the clumsiness and stumbling movements.]

*Sofia: Well, good, at least I am off the hook...Thank God he can be so ridiculous... I am relieved that he can put himself on the spot, relieved that I can hide behind his silliness...*

*Robert: We are both clumsy, off balance, not supervisor and student, just two clumsy oafs, it is a lot of fun to play with you in this way.*

[Movements become more unstable, jerky, clumsy, out of balance, with distorted facial expressions, as if looking into a fun house mirror. Both begin mumbling. She transforms the scene into a personification of two drunks in a bar having an

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

argument. They both begin to move as if drunk, with slurred speech and hiccups. She is the first to use words.]

She: (As a drunk.) Get away, you're drunk!

*Sofia: Now I feel even safer! Never been drunk in my whole life...could never afford to lose control...and I would certainly never allow myself to get drunk with him for real. I am tempted however, to trust him and let go just a little bit...*

Robert: (As a drunk.) So are you!

Sofia: So are you! [She enthusiastically points to a real spot on his shirt and comments with disgust.]

Sofia: Look what you did, you made a mess, you're really drunk.

*Robert: You want me to be the messy one, and you the judge, as my supervisor, yes, to turn the tables on me!*

*Sofia: I am examining him carefully...every inch of his clothes, every expression on his face, every movement that he makes...I do not want to like him! I am looking for ways to attack him, I am searching for faults, I want to create distance...*

Robert: [Looking at his shirt, and transforming to the real here and now relationship between them.] That's what you do, you want to catch me at something.

Sofia: I'm sorry, but it really is funny!

Robert: Yeah right, laugh at me, that's what you always do, show me how imperfect I am, the supervisor who makes a mess!

Sofia: I'm sorry, I'm bad, I know I can be very aggressive.

*Sofia: What a sudden burst of guilt...I fear that I will push him away, I seem to attack when I really care.*

*Robert: You seem a little guilty! Do you think you can really hurt me with this play, do you think I left you because I had no interest in you?*

Robert: That's right, find something to show me that I'm not the God you thought I was, whether it's spots or something else!

Sofia: (Laughing.) I'm sorry, I didn't think you would be hurt, it's only a spot after all, anybody could get a spot on their shirt (with exaggerated concern) you will always be my God, you know that....(after a pause, and obviously enjoying his distress)...but you do indeed look funny with that spot!

*Sofia: Oops! Lost control for a moment there...hide, go back! I am*



## A Chest of Broken Toys

*thinking how great it would be if I could simply tell him, listen, I do totally rely on you, I do feel lonely, I leave this place and I don't know what to do with myself, but if you are there I feel safer. So just promise me you will be there...around all the time, to observe me, to follow me, to support me, to like and admire me, but wholeheartedly, all the time...just take me on...and I can be loyal.*

*Robert: I can see you are relieved that I can play in this way, I do want to reassure you, to invite you to make fun of me, to knock me off my pedestal, this is fun for me too.*

[He becomes indignant and throws his hands up in disgust as he moves toward the witnessing circle.]

Robert: I don't have to put up with this kind of humiliation...!

Sofia: Oh, come on, you don't have to go in there!

*Robert: Now let's see how you feel when I abandon you!*

[She tries to physically stop him from going into the witnessing circle.

They run around the room as he tries to enter the circle.]

Robert: Yesssss, I will go in there!

Sofia: NNNOOHHHH!

Robert: Oh yes I will...I can go in there if I want to! It's my space, and I have the real power, I am the boss, the supervisor!

Sofia: No! I won't let you go in there!

*Sofia: Oh, no!! I was about to tell you that I can't bear it when you leave...not another vacation!*

[He breaks free of her grasp and leaps into the witnessing circle. She wanders aimlessly. She goes to the corner of the room where there are some pillows. She covers herself in a pile of pillows for a few minutes.]

*Robert: You look like a little girl, a child, hiding, alone and vulnerable.*

[There is a long pause. After a few minutes he re-enters from the witnessing circle transformed as a little boy who wants to play in the pillows too. Without hesitation, she becomes a little girl in the scene. They begin to hit each other with pillows.]

Robert: (As a little boy.) Ouch, you're so clumsy, that hurt!" [He snatches the pillow from her and shakes it at her. She tries to grab for the pillow, but he holds it out of reach.]

Sofia: (As a little girl.) Give that to me! [Again he holds the pillow just out of

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

her reach. She tries to grab it from him, but he runs away keeping it out of her reach, taunting her with the pillow.]

*Robert: Oh!, so there is something that you want, underneath the mask of the child, you want something very important, I wonder what it is?*

Sofia: I said, give that to me!

*Sofia: I am so angry! I want you to be real! I like the playfulness, I like your presence. Your availability. Your sweet childish energy. But it doesn't last, it is not mine to have, it lasts for as long as this session lasts. You are acting!*

Robert: No, you're not getting it!

Sofia: I SAID, GIVE IT TO ME!

Robert: NO...! [He continues to play with the pillow, holding it away from her as she tries to snatch it back. After a few moments she transforms the scene and becomes a mother demanding that the little boy behave.]

Sofia: (As the mother.) Bring that back, you know it's the pillow my mother gave to me, I don't want you to mess around with it! Now, be a good boy and bring it back!

Robert: (As a little boy.) Ok, mommy, I won't do that again, I'll be a really good boy!

*Robert: Now you are the mommy, the power player, who scolds me!*

[He brings the pillow over and sits down next to her.]

*Sofia: It feels good to be his mommy. Being his mother makes me need him less...the mother I want him to be, the mother I long for and I attack...I like this reversed situation here.*

Sofia: And don't throw me in those pillows again, I'm growing older! What a thing to do to your own mother! I'm not the one you should play with anymore!

Robert: I'm sorry mommy, what should I do?

Sofia: I don't know! For God sake's go out and date...that should take care of things!

Robert: (As the little boy and the supervisor.) Dating? But... I'm only nine years old!?

Sofia: (As the mother and supervisee.) So what!...in the year 2000, little boys of nine can date of course!

## A Chest of Broken Toys

Robert: But...but.... I don't know what to do!

Sofia: Look...it's up to you! If you want to be dating age, you can. It's your choice. There is always so much choice in life! [She makes a box-like gesture with her index fingers, a specific gesture that he picks up and joins and transforms back to the here and now relationship.]

*Robert: Anything is possible! I see your meaning now, you brought up dating, are you worried about the pleasure that we share in the play. I wonder what you will do now?*

Robert: There is sooooo much choice in life!

Sofia: There is sooooo much choice in life! That's what they've always told me!

Robert: That's what they've always told you?

Sofia: That's what they've always told me! [Gradually, the box begins to shrink until it disappears. They have moved closer to each other in the room, and are face to face, inches apart.]

*Robert: I can feel the intimacy and the pleasure of playing with you, we are face to face, and we are gazing into each other's eyes, this is dangerous!*

*Sofia: How did we get here? From "so little choice in life"? But right now I am here feeling hopeful... I have squeezed myself and my desires, and yet, right now the story changes...this choice, this prospect seems promising...He even seems real...*

[The box has now disappeared, and both are bent over at the waist looking at a small point at the end of their fingers. The two look at each other with suspicion. Slowly, she transforms to becoming an old woman.]

Sofia: (As an old woman.) I'm fed up with you!

Robert: (As an old man.) Oh God! I can't take this anymore. I'm fed up with you!

Sofia: What about me? After 78 years, I'm more than fed up with you!

Robert: Look at you! You're so old, you look terrible, I can't even look at you anymore!

Sofia: And what do you think you look like?! [They look intently at each other. They smile.]

Robert: Would you like a cup of tea?

Sofia: Why, yes! [The two sit together sipping tea.]

*Sofia: God, I want to just be able to enjoy this...but the words come out of my mouth and I don't have control over them, they just destroy the moment I treasure, but I have to test him.*

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

Robert: Listen, I'm sorry. I know I haven't appreciated you enough lately.

Sofia: No, you haven't!

Robert: I really haven't shown you how much I appreciate and respect you...I'm sorry.

Sofia: Well no....you don't have to apologize...don't fill in because you think you have to...I never felt like I've had enough of that... but...you don't have to take care of me.

*Robert: I see the little girl again, and the wife, and then my role shifts to supervisor again, perhaps you have never had enough of...what? Is it a risk for you to depend on me?*

*Sofia: Transparent, needy, anxious, depressed, now he knows it all! Yes, I do want someone to take me on, but not like this...! I want to be strong and powerful, and talented and self-sufficient!*

Robert: No, let me apologize, you are absolutely right, let me take responsibility for what I've done wrong. I didn't thank you enough for taking on so much responsibility last week! You did a great job taking on the group by yourself...I thought of you on Tuesday and hoped it was going well.

Sofia: You did?

Robert: Yes! I thought: I wonder what she is doing with the group now, I hope she's okay. I was concerned, but confident. I didn't tell you how much I appreciated everything you did for the patients and for the unit. I heard from everyone that you did well, and that you handled everything very professionally.

Sofia: Yep I did!

*Sofia: I feel very scared...I am thinking I have been asking for this all along... recognition, attention, appreciation. But I am just very scared...what will this mean?*

[There is a pause between them as they sit silently, smiling at each other. After a short while the feeling tone seems to shift back into a more playful and aggressive climate.]

Sofia: In fact, the patients said that they enjoyed my group much more than yours!

*Robert: Is this your secret desire? We have played this scene before, I can take it, go for it!*

*Sofia: What a dilemma! Will my competence antagonize him, or make him admire me?*

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

Robert: Is that so? So...that's what is going on here...not even two, three short weeks into your internship and already you want to throw me out and take over the unit!

Sofia: Yesssss!

Robert: Yeah, I see the way it is, get rid of him and take over! [Hurt, he stands to walk away and moves again to the witnessing circle.]

Sofia: No, NO, NOOO! I'm sorry, I should never have said that... PLEASE... forgive me... don't take me seriously!

Robert: No, no, it's too late, I see the way you are, I see the way you really are...enough, I'm leaving!

Sofia: No, No! Don't go! Forgive me, I feel so guilty. Of course my group is not better...I know the patients are just splitting, but I just wanted to tease you so badly...I only said it to take revenge on you, please DON'T GO!

Robert: No, I am going for good, how can I believe you? First you sabotage me and now you are trying to seduce me! Let go, I AM OUTTA HERE!  
[After a long struggle to wrestle free he makes a grand exit into the witnessing circle.]

Sofia: Oh no...I messed up again! Come on! This is not fair, you're placing yourself beyond my reach, I can't make up to you this way. I feel so damn guilty and bad, like a baby. [She lays on the floor for three to four minutes. He re-enters from the witnessing circle and makes a call to a senior supervisor.]

*Robert: I don't believe you this time, you are far from a baby, you are a powerful competent woman.*

Robert: Hello? Hi, it's me. I have to talk to you about our intern. You know, I really think we should get rid of her, I mean, she really is a baby, and she's very inappropriate, can't get it together, I'm telling you, she's a wacko, she is crazy....! [She, in the role of the senior supervisor picks up the phone and answers him.]

Sofia: (As the senior supervisor.) Come on, relax, she's just young and inexperienced, a little bit in a mess herself, you know, nothing terrible.

Robert: No!! I'm telling you, there's something verrrrryyy wrong with her, she's a wacko, (screaming, out of control, falling on the floor and writhing) SHE'S A WACKO, I'M TELLING YOU!

Sofia: Listen, you are paranoid, you don't need to worry that much, I think you are losing it yourself...!

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Robert: NOOOOO! SHE'S OUTTA CONTROL! SHE'S CRAZY! WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING! SHE WILL EMBARRASS US IF PEOPLE FIND OUT!

Sofia: LISTEN TO ME! Pull yourself together right away or you're fired. You're ridiculous! [He loses control completely, writhing on the floor. Eventually he regains control and puts his head down looking very sad.]

Robert: (As the student.) I'm sorry, I got so worried, I'm no good, I'm a failure, I'll never be good enough..... I'll never get this stuff, this work!

Sofia: (As the supervisor.) Of course you're good, you're fine. You're going to be fine. It's okay!

Robert: No, I can't do anything right, I am a failure, I just don't get it!

Sofia: That's nonsense. Think of all the things you've done right. You're doing well and you will continue to do well from here on in till the end of the internship.

Robert: How do you know?

Sofia: Because I do. I'll be here to support you like I always have. I believe in you.

Robert: You want to support me?

Sofia: Of course. I'll support you in whatever you want to do!

*Sofia: Oh, I wish he needs me just as much as I do...maybe there is some truth to what he is saying. Maybe he is not so above it all anyway and there is something that I am needed for.*

Robert: You really want to support me? But wait a minute, I'm here to support you!

*Robert: Now it feels like it is just you and me, no roles.*

Sofia: Oh no, you shouldn't have to do that.

Robert: But I want to, that's how it is supposed to work. Don't you trust me?

Sofia: No, it's not that I don't trust you, it's just that... I need so much support... it seems...that I want too much.

Robert: What are you afraid of?

Sofia: It's not me I'm afraid of... it's you that I'm afraid for...!

Robert: You're afraid for me?

Sofia: Yes!

Robert: What are you afraid might happen to me?

Sofia: Oh, I don't know, I'm such a baby, and a burden...!

Robert: Oh, I get it now. You're afraid you're a burden to me, is that it?

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Sofia: YES!!

Robert: I'm fine, you don't need to worry about me, I can take care of myself. I have my own support system, a very strong one that I can rely on. Let me introduce them to you. [He puts his arm around her shoulder and helps her off the floor. He then leads her around the room introducing her to members of his support system.]

*Sofia: For some strange reason this is not so comforting. I can't trust him... the only way I will ever trust him is if I make myself absolutely indispensable to him...I must be needed, I must be invaluable, this is the only way I can ever feel safe.*

Robert: I'd like you to meet my supervisors, all three of them, my family, my colleagues at the institute, my friends and my support group. (Intensifying by getting on all fours on the floor.) Here, let me show you how strong I am. Get on my back!

Sofia: No way, I can't do that.

Robert: Listen, I'm strong, an experienced drama therapist, I've had many students in the past years, I have been through a lot in my career and in my life, I can take it. Get on my back!

Sofia: No way, I'm not getting up there. You don't know what you're taking on, I'm 125 pounds!

*Robert: I can see your struggle, and your desire, I will remain solid in this moment for you, to let you see what this is like.*

[Slowly she sits on his back, supporting her weight with her feet on the floor.]

Robert: Come on, lift your feet up, I can take it!

Sofia: No, you'll get smashed on the floor!

Robert: No I won't, go ahead, lift up your feet! [After a pause she lifts her feet off the floor, she is balanced on his back as neither of them move, and nothing happens.]

Robert: How does it feel up there?

Sofia: This is so great!

*Robert: You deserve it.*

*Sofia: It is extremely tempting...and frightening...and sweet...and lovely... and absurd... and foreign...and surreal...and uncomfortable... God, why can't it be real? Why dip into this ocean inside of me... why open up this wound...Wake up! Take control! It doesn't last, it is not real!*

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

Sofia: [Putting her feet down, still on his back.] That's enough.

Robert: What happened? You were comfortable up there.

Sofia: Well, I just can't let you support me all the time. I am able to give something back to you. You have to let me support you, so that I can let you support me, otherwise it's too much. I can't take it in, it doesn't feel right. I can't have it all to myself...

Robert: No, I guess none of us can ever have it all to ourselves. [They are out of time.]

Robert: Take a minute. [They nod to each other.]

*Discussion.* The mutual positive regard that developed between this supervisor and student was evident in this session, as they played with issues of intimacy, integrity, identification, and competition. Their reflections demonstrate that personal past familial relationships are quite present in supervision, and the capacity the play provided for raising, acknowledging, and clarifying these issues is indispensable to the consolidation of the student's professional identity. The transitional realm of the playspace allowed her to spontaneously revisit her schemas and find a place inside for this new relationship with her supervisor. The playspace also allowed her to express her desire for and fear of support, and to express her strivings for autonomy and competitive urges in a playful way. The effective therapeutic elements of drama therapy were present and contributed to an open and productive supervisory relationship in which alliance-building took place with acknowledgement of the difficult aspects of their relationship: the power differential, evaluation, and internalized shame. As a result, this session contributed to the integration of a secure supervisory relationship between them.

The supervisor's positive feelings toward the student called into play his own past schemas from his supervisors, bringing feelings of confidence, warmth, and generosity into the emotional climate of the session. Perhaps here is one example of how positive regard and learning between supervisor and student can be passed from one generation of drama therapists to the next. Learning about theory and technique is not enough. What each of us takes and holds inside is an image of our supervisor in their emotional and embodied form (Geller, 1987). The vividness, proximity, and intimacy of dramatic play can only serve to deepen and nuance these associations.

The drama therapy community must continue to support the development of successful supervisory relationships, through which the profession will deepen



---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

and grow. We should not be fearful of engaging in the intimacy of clinical learning. We should not hesitate to use our own methodologies as drama therapists in supervision as well as treatment of clients. Through such embodied exploration we are likely to learn much more about the power of our work to enhance healing and learning.

### References

- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss*. London: Basic Books.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Emunah, R. (1989). The use of dramatic enactment in the training of drama therapists. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 16, 29-36.
- Geller, J. D. (1987). The process of psychotherapy: Separation and the complex interplay among empathy, insight and internalization. In Bloom-Feshbach, J. & Bloom-Feshbach, S. (Eds.), *The psychology of separation through the life span*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Irwin, E. (1986). On being and becoming a therapist. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 13, 191-196.
- Johnson, D.R. (1991). The theory and technique of transformations in drama therapy. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 18, 285-300.
- Johnson, D.R. (1984). Establishing the creative arts therapies as an independent profession. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 11, 209-212.
- Johnson, D.R. (1999). The challenge of mentoring. In D. Johnson (Ed.), *Essays in the creative arts therapies: Imaging the birth of a profession*, (pp. 59-65). Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas.
- Johnson, D. (2009). Developmental transformations: Towards the body as presence. In D. Johnson & R. Emunah (Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (pp. 89-116). Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas.
- Johnson, D.R., Forrester, A., Dintino, C., James, M., & Schnee, G., (1996). Towards a poor drama therapy. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 23, 293-308.
- Jones, P., & Dokter, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Supervision of dramatherapy*. London: Routledge.
- Karon, B. P. (1990). Psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic therapy, and the process of supervision. In R. C. Lane (Ed.), *Psychoanalytic approaches to supervision*, (pp. 147-157). New York: Brunner/Mazel.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

- Landy, R. (1982). Training the drama therapist: A four part model. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 9, 91-99.
- Levinson, D. (1978). *Seasons of a man's life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Meekums, B. (2006). Embodiment in dance movement therapy training and practice. In H. Payne (Ed.), *Dance movement therapy: theory, practice, research*. London: Routledge.
- Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Free play: The power of improvisation in life and the arts*. New York: Putnam.
- Orlinsky, D. E., & Geller, J. D. (1991). Patients' representations of their therapists and therapy: A new focus of research. In N. E. Miller, J. Docherty & Luborsky, L. (Eds.), *Psychodynamic treatment research*. New York: Basic Books.
- Panhofer, H., Payne, H., Meekums, B., & Parke, T. (2011). Dancing, moving, and writing in clinical supervision? Employing embodied practices in psychotherapy supervision. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 38, 9-16.
- Payne, H. (Ed.). (2008). *Supervision in dance movement psychotherapy: A practitioner's handbook*. London: Routledge.
- Singer, J. L., & Salovey, P. (1991). Organized knowledge structures and personality: person-schemas, self-schemas, prototypes, and scripts. In M. Horowitz (Ed.), *Person schemas and maladaptive interpersonal behavior patterns*, (pp. 33-79). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Commentary on

“Tending to the Supervisory Relationship through Developmental Transformations”

Navah Steiner<sup>1</sup>

When I thought about my commentary for this article, a line from the Declaration of Independence quite unexpectedly came to mind: “We hold these truths to be self-evident...” I found myself reflecting on what we perceive as obvious truths. Indeed, it is self-evident that all people on any position of the gender continuum are created equal, that climate change is in fact happening, that one should have the right to make decisions about one’s own body and that a drama therapist should in the course of their training be supervised by a drama therapist, who feels comfortable utilizing dramatic techniques in supervision. Yet, I find that while all these matters should be taken as a given, they are sometimes, (as the authors clearly spell out with their statistics of drama therapists leaving the field) met with resistance in our own community and sometimes within us as well. It is interesting to reflect, many years after this article was originally written, on the ways we are showing up for those we mentor. What is it that we can offer those who come to train with us? Now, after being a supervisor and director of training for some time, I can say with fair certainty, that it is in fact, quite simple or self evident. It is ourselves that we offer, nothing more or less than that.

In fact, that is quite a lot. In a world where many are talking on social media about vulnerability, few seem to be able to truly model how to be in that state. The practice of emotional intimacy calls for greater openness and recognition of one’s impact on the other’s freedom and well-being. It is now, more than ever before, that I find a greater urgency and need for the playspace

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. Navah Steiner, MA, RDT, LCAT is a psychotherapist at School of Visual Arts Counseling Services, New York; Director, Institute for Developmental Transformations, New York. [navahjs@gmail.com](mailto:navahjs@gmail.com)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

like the one so vividly portrayed by the authors. Power dynamics and the process of evaluation and shame so often challenge the supervisory relationship, which can hold much promise and potential. Supervisor and trainee can quickly head from the excitement of their creative flow into an impasse. How they emerge together, relationally, from that impasse is the subject of the article and the mission of our work.

I have a memory. I am in the music therapy room at my previous job, the Bellevue Men's Shelter where I worked as a drama therapist for seven years. In the playspace with me is my intern Rania, a woman in her mid 30's from the Middle East. I am pushed up against a door; playfully mock "screaming" as she is stabbing me in the abdomen as "the Palestinian terrorist." The tables turn and I am then oppressing her as "the Israeli." The power dynamics of supervisor/supervisee took on an urgent tone as we played with all aspects of our identities, the playspace providing a safe space for us to work through some of our most unplayable fears and discomfort. It allowed us to remain close colleagues and friends to this day, bearing witness to the very painful challenges of the region we both know intimately.

In writing this reflection and response, I wanted to collaborate with some of my former interns and supervisees, and invite them to comment via the lens of their own experiences on some of the key points brought up by the authors in this article. I asked them to reflect on a particularly salient quote from the article, regarding having an embodied learning experience. (Names have been changed to protect their privacy).

*"Learning about theory and technique is not enough. What each of us takes and holds inside is an image of our supervisor in their emotional and embodied form. The vividness, proximity, and intimacy of dramatic play can only serve to deepen and nuance these associations."*

Amanda, my most recent intern, reflects: "I have a vivid memory of one of our DVT supervisions... I can't recall exactly what you were trying to initiate, but I recall refusing to do anything... just sitting down and disengaging and being totally thrilled by that. My memory is of watching you work very hard to engage me in some form of active play, and I felt incredibly playful (and now that I think about it, delightfully toddler-like) in refusing... I don't think I have ever in my life just sat down and refused to engage. But besides my own feelings of delight, what stands out to me upon reflection is how bold and unapologetic you were as

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

you continued to pester me to engage... how your frustration was slightly perceptible... but how simultaneously aware you seemed to be of the fact that I actually was boldly and unapologetically playing back. When I reflect on this in response to the question on how play deepens these associations, I am struck by the fact that I can't imagine a context or scenario in talk supervision in which I would have ever had the audacity or even a strong enough impulse to tell you "no" or to disengage or to protest or argue, yet, in play, I did all of those things with delight and abandon..."

James, a former intern, comments: "I find shapes of you inside my body; rhythms, patterns. Sometimes I summon you like a spirit when I feel like I need animating, when I worry I'm a little passive or too deep in my head. I do 'Navah Hands' or make a grotesque shrug. I remember an early group from the shelter where the men cast you into Hell -- the images were so rich, Grand Guignol, as you were first the victim, then a demon or a devil."

Micah reflects: "Within the playspace, I was scared because I did not understand it fully and being a person of color I was a bit suspicious about the information I was sharing especially with a 'white woman.' As we continued to play, week after week, I went through many emotions about you: attraction, fear, anger and guilt..."

These responses illuminate a key point that the authors drive home, particularly with their case example: that the embodied, playful encounter is what allows space for both a relational experience of growth and internalized form of learning that stays within the trainee long after their period of training. Rachel reflects on the sense of comfort she received with playing with her various drama therapy supervisors. She states that even to this day, years after graduation, when she feels challenged in her work as a drama therapist, she can call them "into being through the play at any time."

When there is an absence of play in supervision, the supervisor may be avoiding it or colluding with the trainee's resistance. Molly voices regret that we did not play together in supervision during our internship. This left her with the feeling of not fully knowing me as a supervisor and not reaping the full benefits of learning about the technique. In fact, I did engage in avoidance of play for various reasons, one being that I was in a new work environment and was not feeling very playful during the course of her internship. Katie reflects on my collusion with her fear of the play, clearly not helping her in this regard to support her in regulating her shame - as the authors recommend - *within* the playspace:

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

“We had limited play in supervision... I always thought it was perhaps that I was so guarded in our supervision play and likely in our verbal supervision also, guarded and sensitive. The shame stuff is so difficult.”

The role that drama therapists play in mentoring the future generation of practitioners is crucial. This article reminds our community of the lasting effects of a positive, and at times corrective, learning experience, particularly for those who have experienced humiliation and shame at the hands of previous authority figures. Amanda recounts a past negative experience of interning in the theater with a supervisor who sexually and emotionally harassed her. She recalls that she arrived to her drama therapy internship full of shame and overall distrust in the supervisory relationship and internship process. She writes: “I would say that what faithfully chipped away at my shame and distrust was your commitment to our one hour of supervision, the day and time of which rarely wavered. When someone in power has time for someone else, the power dynamic seems to lessen.” The steady, emotional availability of the supervisor is a key factor in a healthy supervisory relationship. My own mentors in the community have modeled this availability in my own internships, which has allowed me, as the authors indicate, to internalize a positive regard to mentorship and supervision and to want to offer it back to those I train.

I will end with Rachel’s thoughts on what she feels is most important for training of drama therapists. She writes about the need for relationships of learning and play that allows for expression and transformation without repeated experience of shame or “badness:” “Drama therapists need to have mentors who are comfortable in their own humanity and vulnerability,” she writes, “while offering mentoring from a place of knowledge and strength that comes from experience.”

The reflections of my former interns and supervisees, not surprisingly, support the major points of this fine article. The authors recognize the immense potential for trainees to grow and heal through playful attachments, and that through power sharing and leveling the playing field, we all can become more open to the experiences of learning and growth.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Conversare:

Developmental Transformations and Social Change NS Delete: Justice<sup>1</sup>

David Read Johnson and Nisha Sajnani

### *Authors' Certification of Brokenness*

*This article is based on a performance presented at the 2010 DvT conference and therefore lacks most of the give and take of the live interaction between the authors that carries much of the meaning. Both authors are more invested in their comments in the margins than the primary text itself, which is now outdated. We also made a number of edits and changes to our comments but did not include these in the text so we have been selective in our openness, which is in contradiction to the unique thrust of the article, which is to include the dynamics of collaboration and competition inherent in any co-authored work. But we don't want you to know about these final negotiations.*



[Note to Reader: This article will include both the deletions and comments made by both co-authors using Track Changes function in Microsoft Word, so that you will be aware of the process of negotiation between the two authors while working on this article, which is in itself relevant to the content of the article.]

*DJ Comment: I put myself as first author because I drafted the article first and therefore most of the ideas here are mine...well actually much of the latter parts have been taken*

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. David Read Johnson, Ph.D., RDT-BCT is Director, Institute for Developmental Transformations; Co-Director, Post Traumatic Stress Center, New Haven, CT; Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine. [ptsdcenter@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ptsdcenter@sbcglobal.net) Nisha Sajnani, Ph.D., RDT-BCT is Associate Professor and Coordinator, Drama Therapy Masters Program, Lesley College, Cambridge, MA; Editor-in-Chief, *The Drama Therapy Review*. [nsajnani@lesley.edu](mailto:nsajnani@lesley.edu)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*from your dissertation, so, hmmm, you are first author for the Playback paper.*

*NS Comment: Yes, we will have to get to that one. This article is based on our conversations and I don't mind you being the first author...for the most part.*

*DJ Comment: So this is complicated: which ideas are mine, which are yours, which are ours, and which have we borrowed from others? Perhaps we should go through the entire text and label each sentence accordingly, so we don't get confused.*

*NS Comment: Noting our influences throughout will help us situate this conversation within a broader discourse.*

*DJ Comment: I'm usually more comfortable not revealing my sources.*

Developmental Transformations (DvT) originated as a form of drama therapy within a psychotherapeutic frame, applicable to work with individuals, groups, and families. More recently, DvT has been redefined as a practice independent of a clinical context. “Developmental Transformations (DvT) is a practice involving the continuous transformation of embodied encounters in the playspace. As a practice, it may be applied as a form of psychotherapy, pedagogy, acting training, performance, spiritual practice, recreation or as an approach to social change. It may also be practiced without reference to one of these frames.” This paper will describe the relationship between DvT theory, method, and social *justice*.

*DJ Comment: And you and I.*

*NS Comment: And Us.*

### *Theory*

DvT is based on the proposition, or assumption, that Being is *unstable*. This instability arises out of the perception of *difference*, for with difference objects emerge with their separateness, or relation. This separation remains unstable and never completely definable. Once difference has occurred, *preference* arises and permeates these objects, and this preference is another name for desire, which brings into being longing and need and want and loss, all aspects of experience the Buddha tells us lead to turbulence and suffering. Suffering arises out of desire (preference), for desire presumes a lack. We generally respond to preference by bringing the preferred objects closer to us and pushing the



---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

unpreferred away; or by moving closer to the preferred objects and further away from the unpreferred; that is, our being becomes animated and movement occurs.

*NS Comment: We have to address what "pushing the unpreferred away" means in the context of social justice. Does this mean isolating, criminalizing, forced displacement, incarceration, etc. We also have to question who the 'we' is in this text.*

*DJ Comment: Yes, all of those and more. And perhaps it is best to use the term 'people' instead of we. Even that is questionable because of the tyranny of the generalization. Perhaps power dynamics are specific to each case; perhaps generalizing is a form of dominance or control over the unique and therefore autonomous nature of the particular?*

*NS Comment: Yes, there is something unsettling for me about this ontology. For one, a description is never neutral unless you're trying to perform what Donna Haraway has called "the forbidden God trick"...You are stating what you see and that is bound up with who you are in any given moment.*

*DJ: Comment: It seems that you are expressing discomfort with the starkness of these concepts, and wish that they were presented with more, shall I say, h'ish? If so, I don't disagree with that idea.*

*NS Comment: Yes, and more p'oa. This description can only ever be partially bound up with each of our own histories.*

As we tend to collect the preferred and distance ourselves from the unpreferred, *territories* develop, and out of territories arise possession, identity, social classes, tribes, nations, ownership, categories, homes, and otherness in general. What is left over is often unclaimed territory, no man's land, or the wilderness.

*DJ Comment: To develop a theory of power that does not engage with power seems impossible to me. We need many kinds of power: power to do good, power to protect, power to achieve peace. If you believe that once power is granted existence, in reality or theory, then peace is impossible,.....then I think we are in trouble.....actually, we ARE in trouble, so maybe you are right!*

*NS Comment: Power needs to be balanced with humility. I am suggesting that we have the power to describe reality in different ways and that some ways of theorizing may be more*

---

## ***A Chest of Broken Toys***

*useful than others in both naming what is and naming what ought to be.*

All of these territories are unstable, as the continuous changes in desire and the actions of others shift the contents of these territories back and forth, sometimes drastically and at great cost. Thus an urge may arise to stabilize these movements, and preserve those territories that are preferred, and push away attempts to alter the boundaries between them. For attempts to alter boundaries unilaterally produces ~~fear~~

*DJ Delete: Comment: It may produce other affects such as anger or shame.*

*NS Comment: all of which may be responses to fear.*

and disturbs or destabilizes the other, because a boundary is a property of both sides. In so doing, the shifting and oscillating areas among territories gains definition as borders, which can be defended, guarded, and gated. Still others may press against them, attempt to overrun them, seeking those preferred objects they desire, whether it be affiliation, or food, or oil, or land, or people, or credit, or money.

*DJ Comment: The possession and control of women throughout history is a good example.*

*NS Comment: It's not just women who are caught up in the struggle. Children are also stolen from their parents, men are forcefully recruited. Everyone is caught up in the struggle. What about women? Do you think we'd be in the mess we're in if women were in charge?*

*DJ Comment: Ask Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, or Sarah Palin. I won't count Medea, because she only ate her own children, and did not go to war.*

*NS Comment: Well, our history is one where men have largely held power over women so it's fair to say that they were operating within a patriarchal system.*

*DJ Comment: I don't think you can extricate women from the dynamics of power. I presume that wish supports your own desire to place yourself outside of your own analysis of power.*

*NS Comment: No, I'm not absolving women of responsibility just saying that the trouble with describing what is at play...difference giving way to preference which leads to the*

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*formation and preservation of territories... is that it is an old story. I suppose to get to a new story, we have to revisit and work through the old... that makes me think of cultural theorist Stuart Hall who talks about the inescapability of language both verbal and nonverbal – you have to get into language in order to get out of it.*

*DJ Comment: I just love how you invoke these male authorities to support your opinion.*

*NS Comment: And I just love how you invoke the Buddha to support yours. I mean, it's hard to argue with the Buddha! Really, where would any of us be without the support of wise, benevolent white men?*

*DJ Comment: Thank you. The Buddha was white?*

To the extent that these borders become rigid and impermeable, they may be challenged, and these acts of challenge may spur new acts of retaliation and violence, and the desire to expand one's territory in order to protect oneself from incursion. One does so usually by advancing one's own boundaries, and in this process *history* emerges, as the definition, defense, and loss of territory is remembered, recorded, and memorialized, and this history comes to influence how differences are perceived, and what objects are preferred, and what territories are defended.

*NS Comment: So far, this analysis is steeped in a fear of otherness like the kind mobilized to fuel xenophobic beliefs that 'They' want what 'We' have (our jobs, our land, our resources). Is there nothing generative that can come of our encounters with difference and our struggle to co-exist? Is DvT only about managing fear or can it also be about generating love in all of its forms?*

*DJ Comment: I agree with you and have added this section on more positive potential outcomes.*

When boundaries are altered with mutual agreement among the parties, more positive outcomes emerge, such as trade, cooperation, collaboration, and intimacy. The back and forth of contents across the boundary between people, groups, and nations works especially well when what is preferred by one is unpreferred by the other. Even more positive outcomes arise when both parties

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

agree to share what they both view as unpreferred, relying less on expulsion as a means of maintaining stability.

In this analysis, *power* is defined as the energy directed to managing the boundaries of territories, whether to maintain, expand, or shed territory.

*NS Comment: As we work on this, we should integrate Michel Foucault's thinking here about the bodies through which authority is expressed – religious, moral, civic, legal etc. and also talk about how our experiences of power influence our imaginations and our collective social memory. We should also integrate Gilles Deleuze and Judith Butler's ideas about repetition.*

Power shapes how history is archived in social memory and is enforced through repetition.

*DJ Comment: You have a habit of referencing all these other elite intellectuals, as if you hung out with them...I look forward to the time you might do the same with me! “This is Johnson's h'ish-stability conceptual arc...” or something, and you will have actually hung out with me.*

*NS Comment: Do you think that I don't care about you or your ideas? My perspectives on illness, anxiety, distress, behavior, human systems, and well-being have all been influenced by our conversations. Though, I suppose it is easier to accommodate the ideas of dead people! Maybe I could claim my DvT roots a little more – I don't know, I don't want to feel like my ideas and actions are but a branch off of your central tree. Then again, I am performing this paper with you.*

*DJ: I have known branches. You are no branch.....You have no idea what I think about you.*

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*NS Comment: Did you want to tell me now?*

*DJ Comment: I am not sure...*

*NS Comment: That's a bit awkward. Alright. In the meantime, we were working out the problem of Negation. The Negation of the Other.*

*DJ Comment: When we begin with difference, we cannot eradicate negation. The amazing thing is that in the effort to do so, our world arises!*

Agency is defined as the source of this power, and is identified as components of either Self or Other, whether these be individual persons, groups, or collective cultural entities.

*NS Comment: Agency is not limited to the function of the individual, but also a historical and collective expression referring to the agency of social beings or social groups to make their own free choices.*

*DJ Comment: I agree. Change made.*

Control is the enactment of power by an agent, be it an individual, group, or societal force. Control may be secured through various forms of threat to or consent by the populace. Those with the capital necessary to territorialize the imagination and its material expression, to attribute meaning to form, and to secure the repetition of the preferred social, sexual, and political body through multiple forms of representation.

*DJ Delete.*

~~This constitutes the 'Me' that every social organization or human system inevitably creates and those who do not fit within the signification and organization of 'Me' become Other.~~

*DJ Delete: Move to section below. Repetitive*

*NS Comment: You know, I liked that part there. You are moving my ideas around, deleting me, calling*

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*me repetitive, forcing me to italicize! Is this your text or ours?*

*DJ Comment: You don't have to ask me for permission to edit this text. Do you feel this is mine?*

*NS Comment: Well, we are both working out this extension of DvT theory but yes, as you first articulated DvT, and because you run the Institute, and because you're my boss – I do feel, from time to time, that this is more yours than ours – that you may always want the final word.*

Territories whose boundaries are under my control (power plus agency) are seen as my possession, such as self, ideas, etc. Territories controlled by others are viewed as their possessions.

*NS Comment: Why this assumption about the drive to possess? Do you feel the drive to possess? To own?*

*DJ Comment: Of course! Because in this analysis territory is created out of a drive to stabilize desire, and this leads to holding, clutching, grasping, and defending, for to lose one's territory is to risk being open to the instability of desire and the difference underlying it. Buddha said it better. In other words, the very existence of territory reveals the act of power and control – really both Marx and Foucault say the same thing.*

*NS Comment: It is hard for me to argue with Buddha, Marx and Foucault, much easier with you. This is a good place to add in that deleted bit earlier.*

*Dominant control* requires the capital necessary to territorialize the imagination and its material expression, to attribute meaning to form, and to secure the repetition of preferred social, sexual, and political bodies through

---

## ***A Chest of Broken Toys***

multiple forms of representation. Territory not under anyone's control ~~can be termed unclaimed, or wilderness.~~

*NS Comment: Our history of indigenous colonization and cultural decimation hinged on this idea. Someone assumed that they inhabited the 'wilderness' and that this area was 'unclaimed' or 'not under any control.' Columbus suffered from this delusion that 'all that I see here is mine and shall be controlled by Me.' In fact, I think that this primary delusion is what gives rise to social anxiety...the fact that we are living on stolen territory and living off the backs of others. Are we bound to describing coexistence in this way? I'm thinking about Audre Lorde's essay 'The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's house'... Are we doomed to think of coexistence in this way?*

*DJ Comment: Distressed by the description of these base instincts, you appear to feel the urge to push them away, disidentify, unclaim them, finding them the unpreferred delusion, and thus seek out "not everyone," that is, someone who is other to this, in a territory you can go to feel safer, better, such as the Romantic notion of the Noble Savage, who eschews territory and is one with nature: Avatar, Pocahontas, aborigines. When you find this territory, let me know, and I will come. In this paper, are we describing what is or has been, or what we wish to be?*

*NS Comment: That is the greatest philosophical conundrum: to connect what is with what ought to be and I don't think we can really fully do either though that shouldn't stop us from trying. I mean, is there really a way to describe what IS in a way that isn't bound by the same rules we have always played by so that we don't end up repeating the same story? I'm not looking for an imaginary uncorrupted*

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*paradise untouched by a history of abusive power relations but – I just feel the shortcomings in my own worldview and yours. Ideas about shared authority that I have learned from feminist, indigenous, and other scholars encourage me to avoid describing what IS by old colonial rules. For example, what do you think about the anti-Darwinian philosophy against natural selection that proposes that we have become better at collaborating over time? That too, could be the reality we describe, and in doing so, repeat it, and in repeating it, sustain it.*

*DJ Comment: I think that through this process we have embarked upon, you and I will come to a place like that, where we achieve a process of collaboration....but collaboration at what levels?....the written word?.....our comfort being in each other's presence?.....the ability to share our inner excitements?.....I personally do not know a way there without engaging with our fears, our competitions, our mutual invasions and missteps.....if you know how to avoid these, please show me the way.*

*NS Comment: I agree. We have to meet...and keep meeting...it is in the encounter that we change...anything.*

Generally, boundaries or borders that I control can have the function of keeping the other *out*. However, every territory develops objects that become unpreferred. The first impulse is often to expel these objects into the environment, either others or the wilderness; or to destroy them or transform them into objects that are preferred. Some objects cannot be destroyed or expelled, and these are instead contained within one's territory, in a territory that I control but whose function is to keep the other in. Examples of these structures include prisons, ghettos, and mental hospitals. Much effort is spent by territories to find and round up and either destroy, imprison, contain, or expel objects that have become



## A Chest of Broken Toys

unpreferred, whether they be insects, pests, criminals, terrorist cells, Jews, or Palestinians.

*NS Delete: Palestinians.*

*DJ Delete: Jews.*

Generally speaking, the larger and more organized a territory is, the more unpreferred objects are produced within it, requiring larger and larger areas around it to hold them, ~~such as New Jersey for Manhattan, or black ghettos surrounding an upscale downtown.~~ A very clean house produces more garbage.

*DJ Comment: Associating New Jersey and black ghettos with garbage is really too strong. How come you didn't call me on this one? Bystander! I'm taking it out before you can.*

*NS Comment: This is not neutral philosophy. See my earlier comments. You and I are writing this. For you, as the first author, black ghettos are considered the unpreferred. Taking this out will only cover that up.*

*DJ Comment: Ouch.....I will prefer the cover-up to the revelation.*

There is also Common Space, which tends to lie between territories that are at peace. ~~There is also Overlapping Space, such as the concepts of private property and eminent domain in the West.~~

*NS Comment: I think this is getting somewhere but it needs to be developed more so we should remove it for the time being – are you thinking here of “international” waters or airspace?*

*DJ Comment: I agree. I would need to describe the principle of eminent domain, which is what you refer to as owning common property such as land or air or sea. Eminent domain is a legal concept in which the collective's needs are privileged over the individual's. Thus the government can force you to*

---

## ***A Chest of Broken Toys***

*sell your house to them so they can put in a railroad  
or highway. It places a limit on private property.*

*NS Comment: We would also need to discuss who  
determines collective versus individual needs.*

Generally, violence or trauma (the intrusion of fear) induces a territory to become heavily bordered, and its border region to become more clearly demarcated. In contrast, peaceful relations among contiguous territories may lead to less guarded and more ambiguously defined border areas. In this sense, the dimensionality of the boundary is directly related to the openness, or ~~L~~ove,

*DJ Delete: Intimacy.*

*NS: This work is about love and fear.*

*intimacy* established between neighboring territories. At its root, these dynamics of *fear and love* interact to produce the world we live in. Intimacy becomes the collateral damage or collateral gain in this eternal struggle to coexist.

*DJ Comment: Love and Fear, yes, and our fear of  
love. I sense your fear of love is receding. What  
about my love and fear of you, and your love and  
fear of me? I actually do not fear you. Or perhaps  
I am not aware of my fear of you.*

*NS Comment: I don't think I fear you but I feel the  
necessary and inevitable sea of change in our  
relationship. Sometimes I fear the loss of you. The  
measure of love is loss.*

*DJ Comment: I lose you many times each day.*

Territories may be defined in various ways, most often either by their borders, or by their Centers. Centers are produced and sustained by the repetition of preferences by those who have the means to do so over time, and are technically located at the conceptual level though they cloak themselves with material expressions such as buildings, objects, and monuments. Often a spatial location may symbolize this Center (such as London, Beirut, or Delhi), but in

## A Chest of Broken Toys

many cases the Center has no location (Torah, Al-Qaeda, democracy). The more that a territories' Center is defined on the conceptual plane and not in the sensory

*NS Delete: material*

material plane, the more impervious it is to invasion or violence

*DJ Delete: or transformation.*

or transformation. The stronger the idea of center is, the greater tolerance

*NS Delete: Capacity*

capacity the territory will have for integrating

*DJ Delete: assimilating*

assimilating new members from diverse backgrounds.

*NS Comment: The ideology has to be elastic in order to work. For example, policy instruments developed by the US government have not always reflected a tolerance for difference...immigration policies have assimilated difference by conflating preferred identities with freedom while simultaneously positioning the Other as a threat to this conceptual identity. This discursive elasticity is what allows this country to keep the unpreferred 'in' while still keeping Others 'out'.*

*DJ Comment: The US is not a sentient entity, so cannot tolerate or not tolerate anything. The issue is perhaps better phrased as which differences are tolerated and which ones are not within U.S. culture? Otherwise, I am in agreement.*

*Towards the Performance of a Just Society*

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

What are the elements of a ‘just’ society? Surely there is no one definition. A Marxist perspective is likely to endorse “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” A capitalist perspective: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his ability.” A classist perspective: “from each, and to each, according to his station.” A Buddhist perspective might view such differences as unnecessary or irrelevant.

*NS Comment: If the Buddhist were hungry, he would care.*

*DJ Comment: To the Buddhist, hunger is an illusion.*

*NS Comment: Your version of the Buddhist seems to exist outside everyday relations of power and material needs – in that utopia you commented on earlier. We are trying to position DvT as a pragmatic response to social injustice.*

For the time being, we will refer to an ‘unjust’ society as one that continues to privilege some desires over others at the cost of unnecessary suffering.

*NS Comment: So here, the question becomes: “who defines what is ‘unnecessary suffering’?” In Quebec, they had a version of this debate but framed around what constitutes a ‘reasonable accommodation’ to difference. I’m still not sure that we will be able to upset the object/subject, center/margin binary or the dominant/other duality because we have taken that as our starting point. I think we need to go back to the beginning and ask ourselves where we find the ‘social.’ I mean, how do we really internalize a sense of the social? Memes, traces, impressions... I think we need to keep this question open.*

*DJ Comment: Yes I like this point. But like DvT in general, my sentiment is not to imagine a transcendence over the given circumstances, but rather an acknowledgement of it and placing it under new conditions, that of the playspace. Offering a world in which subject/object, center/margin, or dominant/oppressed polarities do*

---

---

## A Chest of Broken Toys

*not exist, is for utopian strategies that to me seem to avoid the problems that beset us. I think we need to put these polarities into play. What else can we do? Are there not to be employers and employees? Mentors and apprentices? People we look up to and down at? Where is equality except as a negation of difference?*

*NS Comment: Agreed. We need to address actual problems. Back to the question of who determines 'unnecessary suffering'...I'm reminded of the analogy of equality as a race. Is equality having everyone start at the same line in the race with the same running shoes or would it be fairer to give out specific kinds of shoes to best fit the runner, or have people start at different lines based on their advantages or privileges like giving a mother running with child a head start...or Switzerland's attempt to eradicate poverty by providing everyone with a basic minimum monthly income. Canada tried that too actually.*

*DJ Comment: Handicapping? Affirmative action? Yes, but do these changes eradicate difference? In what way are you and I completely equal? Our whole relationship is a dynamic teeter-totter of shifting power and control. If I am a white, older, male and you are a less-white,*

*NS Comment: Less white?*

*DJ Comment: More dark?, younger, female, if I am your employer, if I have more financial resources, if I have history behind me that empowers me and provides me with confidence, does that mean that what happens between us in our personal encounter is necessarily determined by these forces and facts? Or does that make how we feel for each other and our desire to work together all the more amazing?*

---

## ***A Chest of Broken Toys***

*NS Comment: We are not completely equal or the same and that's not what we should strive for. Yes, our history influences our encounter but does not need to determine it. I probably make less than half of what you do, am always questioned about the spelling of my last name by the well-meaning child welfare workers, and am not a citizen in the country where I work and pay taxes. These things bother me but they do not completely interfere with our collaboration.*

*DJ Comment: Or are we kidding ourselves?...Perhaps you want to work with me because of these very background attributes of power that I bring with me, which you at times criticize, but secretly plan to acquire?*

*NS Comment: Of course, that's the plan! By the end of this paper, I will be an old, wealthy, white man. I can't help but wonder what you gain from working with me. What currency do you gain from positioning yourself in relation to me, your "less-white" colleague?*

*DJ Comment: Do you want something else from our relationship, from us, from me? Who am I outside of these territories of power? There is my form and there is my leakage. Which do you want? How much do these power dynamics interfere with our relationship and how much do they determine our relationship?*

*NS Comment: I want some intangible thing- some place that resides in the moment just before our roles interfere with what we can create together... the capacity to work closely with you with an awareness of our social identities yet with the ability to suspend them to allow for new ideas and possibilities to arise.*

## A Chest of Broken Toys

*DJ Comment: Yes, that is what I want also. And this is why I appreciate your willingness to place yourself in proximity to me; how else can we loosen ourselves from these boundaries, these territories, these fears? How can presence exist in a world infused by power differentials? You are brave to trust me.*

A primary assumption within this paper is that society is a complex, living, interdependent social, economic, and material organism comprised of human beings who repeat patterns of interrelation towards maintaining survival and growth.

*NS Comment: Ok, so let's bring back the idea of the Commons, the question of who has the right to decide who controls Air, Water, and Land? The idea that we have a Right to Own (property, people, etc) is so woven into the fabric of our society.*

*DJ Comment: Here is the rub: collective owning of the commons is a socialist idea, eminent domain. Too much power in the Collective has led to some really bad events, once the Collective is corrupted by a power elite. Giving ownership to individuals has been a balancing force in radical democracies to counter this tendency of collective will. This issue is a real problem, for power seeks expression within any form of social organization.*

*NS Comment: But we're not living in a true democracy so I'm not sure that we have actually let ourselves experience real shared authority.*

~~From a human rights framework, detailed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights articulated and adopted Dec. 10, 1948 by the United Nations, there are 30 statements about what kinds of suffering should be avoided and about what guidelines would create a 'just' society including the right to self determination.~~

*DJ Comment: I don't mind this, but in this paper I think it is better to stick within the boundaries of a DvT perspective if possible. Delete.*

---

## ***A Chest of Broken Toys***

*NS Comment: Certainly there are limitations to using a Human Rights Framework – it is modeled on the needs and desires of equal individuals devoid of historical relations of power but it reflects an ideal of how we might share authority while respecting the inherent dignity of all human beings so it's pretty relevant. That said, I'm fine with leaving it out for now.*

The health and well-being of societies is connected, in large part, to its economic wealth and social resources as these assets determine the degree to which an individual or a society as a whole can evolve. However, a core requirement of a capitalist society is that a large portion of the population must not possess the resources of self-determination. Therefore, in order to survive, they are forced to undercut the sale of their own labor. Unfortunately, economic growth constantly appears to trump social welfare.

*DJ Comment: So I hate to take this out, but it doesn't fit here for two reasons: one, our analysis is not limited only to capitalist societies, and two, we should not be presenting only a Marxist view of the issue. Our analysis should serve as a basis of analysis for numerous perspectives, each of which could benefit from the ideas presented from within a DvT perspective.*

*NS Comment: I know we still need to work this part out but I think its important to link DvT to other ideas about self and society rather than keeping it only to ourselves - only to those who have trained in it.*

*DJ Comment: I accept this point. Keep it in.*

From our theoretical framework, there are several principles that form the basis of a just society: 1) the *permeability* of boundaries should be high; that is the capacity to tolerate co-existence; 2) *mobility* of people and social and material resources across territories should be frequent and relatively unimpeded; 3) the *dispersion* of and *responsibility* for the unpreferred should be widely shared by all connected territories; 4) the relationship between the center and the margins should be *fluid*, meaning that the conceptual and spatial organization of territories will change over time; and 5) the agency of larger social territories should be determined by the



---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

agencies of smaller social territories (ultimately individuals) – meaning that individuals have *frequent and direct* means of controlling the power of the collectives within which they belong and the labor in which they engage. This will involve engendering the capacity for local governance.

*NS Comment: Direct democracy is one way that we can express the DvT ethic and ideal of mutuality in society. This involves a willingness to assume shared responsibility...which is not something that everyone may want.*

Ultimately, social injustice may be characterized by people becoming trapped in a highly bounded, marginalized spaces, with a preponderance of the unpreferred, and subject to the control of others.

*DJ Comment: I am thinking of when this has happened to me.*

*NS Comment: Like when? I know that you don't like highly bounded, marginalized spaces where you are subject to the control of others...in fact, in some ways you have kept DvT marginalized as you have tried to protect it from dominant ideas about health, illness and change. Not writing a book and constantly changing the theory is a way of avoiding being scrutinized, judged, and trapped.*

*DJ Comment: You are right. That's why I want to write this paper with you, so that you can help free me from the marginalized space I place myself in. How about you?*

*NS Comment: Of course – that's why I care so much about it. Our work together on this has helped me to transform the idea of social justice from an intangible abstraction to an everyday intimate practice that has real implications for how we treat one another in our families, in our clinic team, with those we work with, in the schools that we work in, and in other organizations of social life.*

*DJ Comment: And I so want to help you free yourself as much as can be imagined so that you*

## A Chest of Broken Toys

*can do even more amazing things than you have already accomplished.*

*NS Comment: You want to help me free myself? Well, I suppose I can accept this as you are my mentor and friend but it sounds a little pejorative.*

*DJ Comment: I do not want to control you but I do want to stay in proximity to you, so I think you probably sense it in me every time you do move away, which I officially support of course.*

*NS Comment: And unofficially? I like that you want me close.*

*DJ Comment: Happiness for me is being with someone who freely chooses to stay close to me and yet who doesn't feel that I am being controlling, no, who knows that they can remain secure even when I am controlling.*

*NS Comment: Well, you are a little controlling. For me, the feeling of security arises from the repetition of encounters like this. I'd miss you if I were to leave.*

*DJ Comment: Secure relationships take time to form. I know that you are on your own journey, a journey different than mine. You will move on, like the others.*

*NS Comment: I have struggled with feeling like I need to find my own voice- not because you are controlling me but because in order to stay close, I need to find my own distinct voice alongside yours.*

*DJ Comment: So, will you linger here for just a while?*

*NS Comment: For as long as I can before the next transformation.*

*DJ Comment: That all things are impermanent, tears me apart.*

We believe that Developmental Transformations as a process and a practice deeply supports the permeability, mobility, dispersion, and fluidity of boundaries, territories, and histories, and thus can have a positive effect on the dynamics of power, control, and agency in human relations. ~~It is to this effort we now turn.~~

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

*NS Comment: You know, we ought to end here. DvT and its effects on unsettling power dynamics might be explored in another paper.*

*DJ Comment: I agree, especially since we will have to provide a suggestion for improving the world and we haven't really figured that out yet. Are you willing to continue working on this with me?*

It is to this effort we will turn in a companion article.

*NS Comment: Yes. I am willing.*

*DJ Comment: Yes, but only if you are acting on your own free will?*

*NS Comment: My, own, will?*

*DJ Comment: Yes, are you acting on your own, free, will?*

*NS Comment: I am acting... Aren't you acting?*

*DJ Comment: Yes, I am acting.*

*NS Comment: Isn't this a performance?*

*DJ Comment: Of course. A performance of power.*

*NS Comment: That isn't the same as the use of power.*

*DJ Comment: I don't believe so.*

*NS Comment: So then we can Accept All Changes?*

*DJ Comment: Yes. Go ahead, push the button, and oh, delete the comments.*

*NS Comment: Comments deleted, and Track Changes has been turned off.*

*DJ Comment: At least for now.*

*NS Comment: At least for now.*

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

Commentary on

“Conversare: Developmental Transformations and Social Change  
NS Delete: Justice”

Christine Mayor<sup>1</sup>

My response requires my own kind of performance. I find myself torn by the multiplicity of possible scripts from which to act: an academic one, an activist one, a personal one. Perhaps this is the function of this piece – it intentionally makes plain the multiple layers and dynamics of the living, relational exchange underpinning the theory of difference, power, and social justice that the authors seek to explain. So in the spirit of this piece, I will produce my own three acts in response to David Johnson and Nisha Sajjani’s work.

*For my academic performance:*

Judith Butler’s (1988; 1990) distinction between performative (where norms are perpetuated through repetition and ritual in a way that proceed, constrain and exceed the performer; where discourse has the capacity to produce what it names) and performance (as the subject’s potential for agency) is crucial in examining how particular versions of acceptable social roles and relational dynamics are (re)produced. This piece – which simultaneously (re)produces a dominant narrative and demonstrates two individuals’ attempts at agency, independent thought and collaborative work – serves as a beautiful illustration of Butler’s theory. Butler argues that performativity only appears natural to the extent that the illusion of agency is maintained. What I think this piece does brilliantly is reveal this tension, without resolving it for the reader. We are left to choose where we would place ourselves and whether we agree with the deletions, additions, and reformatting argued over by the authors. The format itself asks us to question the dominant theory proposed by the authors, and by extension, may

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. Christine Mayor, M.A., RDT is Assistant Clinical Director, Post Traumatic Stress Center, New Haven, CT; [camyr@mta.ca](mailto:camyr@mta.ca)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

evoke in the reader an interest in questioning other truths and narratives espoused in the founding myths of a nation, in the media, in our communities, in our most intimate relationships, and indeed even in DvT. The track changes dialogue pushes us to practice exactly what the theory purports to do.

Further, I found myself returning multiple times to the study of historiography; that is, the way that history is recorded and written tells you more about the author's own bias and the current events at the time of writing, than the actual historical event itself. Given my current profession, it is perhaps not surprising that as a history undergraduate major, that much of my research was focused on what was "leaking out" from under the supposedly objective narrative of history. While reading this piece, I was much more interested in the relational dynamic that increasingly encroached into the paper than I was the actual theoretical content. As a historian, I wonder how our experience of this piece might be altered if we were first presented with the final agreed upon version of the theory without the track changes, only to have a second version follow that presents the cracks, disagreements, fight for territory, and love for each other. This might have been a more powerful portrayal not only of their intended deconstruction of social injustice and power, but also the essence of a DvT session.

### *For my activist performance:*

At first, I was excited at the potential for new theory and language to make social justice work translatable to DvT practitioners and to make DvT theory and practice understandable in the language of critical theory. Indeed, it was during rich moments of negotiation between Nisha and David that new thoughts emerged for me. This speaks to the theory articulated here; where the margins and the meeting places have simultaneous potential for new growth or destruction. The metaphor that came to mind is that of tectonic plates rubbing against each other, creating the friction and fault lines for volcanoes and earthquakes.

Yet, while reading the paper, I was aware of the limitations of such an approach to social justice. So often the work of social justice begins with awareness and attempting to articulate the problem, but becomes stuck in the articulation. The acknowledgement at the end of the piece that another paper will be needed in order to take this work further into the realm of practically addressing injustices was important, but also unsatisfying. Is this paper really

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

working towards creating justice, or is it simply producing theory? If there is never a move into action, what is the value?

Beyond simply finding a way to play with the power dynamics, what can DvT theory or practice offer the critical issues of racism, violence, poverty, or war? Is simply pointing to the ability of individuals or groups to continually create and re-create the conditions of the playspace enough? For whom is this not possible? Is it an easy way out? Or is this simply the performance of activism? The hope is that through this fault line, new space will be created in which the work may be done.

*For my personal performance:*

I remember witnessing this paper when it was performed as a plenary at the seventh DvT conference. I remember the twinkle and sense of play between the two of them. The moment of this performance has passed. Their relationship has transformed. The pain of impermanence that David articulates here echoes my own nostalgia. It is bittersweet.

On paper, this piece feels heavier, treacherous even. While there are moments that remain light or even tender, some of the playfulness of the original performance is stripped away. Without the physical bodies, the mutual improvisations, the in-performance leakage and variation, the paper seems instead to make more painfully clear the power dynamics, rather than demonstrating the transformative impact of the ability to play with power inequalities.

To be honest, I wanted to insert myself into the paper. I wanted to make, take, steal, conquer my own territory in the piece, in their relationship. This isn't really surprising given that I was raised in a place where disagreement means you are intimately engaged with another. Perhaps I was missing the experience that comes with the meeting place of difference. Or perhaps my disagreement is simply another performance. If so, I hope it has evoked another layer of possession, power and preference, in you, the next reader.

### Capoeira and Developmental Transformations

Mira Rozenberg<sup>1</sup>

#### *Author's Certification of Brokenness*

*I have no authority to write an article on capoeira: I am not Brazilian, do not speak Portuguese, am not a descendant of oppressed slaves and have only been practicing for 10 years. I have achieved only the ranks of a low-level instructor in New Haven. I have been stuck at many plateaus in my training, slacked off, and have even given up capoeira for periods of time. However, I will never stop [exploring/enjoying/avoiding/hating/loving/ strengthening] playing and fighting (and play-fighting). I continue my practices to embody not-being-afraid of either fear or power, and to live in uncertainty with grace. And mostly just dance it out.*

*In both capoeira and DvT practices, I am trying to figure out how to put skill into action -- especially when I'm called upon to invoke my inner warrior in important real life situations. Sometimes a good kick in the face or a snappy take-down is a humble reminder to re-examine everything I thought I knew, especially whenever I thought I had life figured out. Such a kick in the face is probably more effective than reading a flawed and incomplete article like this one.*



We are all dressed in uniform: white pants, white shirts, seated in a circle. The musicians holding instruments are elevated on a long bench at the head of the circle. Two of us squat down face to face close to the ground by the feet of the musicians. We briefly take one another in, perhaps an eye-to-eye glance, perhaps a smile. We wait for the rhythmic tone of the Berimbau (instrument) to cue us to answer the call, and respond to the song: “Iê viva meu deus, camará... Iê viva

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. Mira Rozenberg, M.A., RDT is a drama therapist in private practice, and Faculty, Montreal DvT Institute. [mira.rozenberg@gmail.com](mailto:mira.rozenberg@gmail.com)

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

meu mestre camará...Iê volta do mundo... Iê é hora é hora... Iê a capoeira!” “Viva my God... Viva, my master... around the world... now is the time, here is the place... I call out Capoeira! my friend!” Reaching up with open arms, we touch hands, and eyeing the other carefully, we “aú” (cartwheel) into the center of the circle. In our personal encounter we are elevated by the energy of the others seated in the circle. So begins the dance; we play, kick, move, roll, tumble, fake, defend, get kicked, dodge the kick, move away, move in close. We are carried away inside of this circle created over 400 years ago; we play together in this *roda* where every other fight has happened before us. We honor the fight for freedom from not so distant history, and for us here right now. Lost in the trance of rhythm and movement we hear the Mestre cue the music to complete our game – for now. We come back to the foot of the instruments, shake hands, and are absorbed back into the circle to witness the next game.

Capoeira is a rich and complex Brazilian martial art form: It is a fight, a dance, a playful encounter, and an acrobatic performance of skill and wit. It is community (local and global) that shapes a sense of belonging and identity. Capoeira is about connection, strategy, deception, and history that is preserved in song, music and movement. Thousands of people around the world have had the opportunity to become immersed in this rigorous and challenging practice. People are drawn in by the rhythms of the music, the human connection, the sport, the art, the fight and Brazilian culture. The capoeirista's (capoeira practitioner's) perceived limitations are expanded both physically and psychologically through commitment and practice. Capoeira is inherently rich in individual and social growth opportunities and represents a paradigm for the potential use as an interactive or group therapeutic process. Being a martial art, capoeira is not a form of therapy, yet it is a body-based practice that improves several aspects of social and emotional functioning.

Developmental Transformations (DvT) is a modern existential body-based and playful practice of drama therapy that parallels many aspects of capoeira. DvT's origins include psychology, drama therapy and existentialism, in contrast to capoeira's origins in systematic oppression. Both practices share a commitment to transformation, growth, empowerment and healing. In this paper I will outline how capoeira aligns with the drama therapeutic model of DvT, whose fundamental goals are diversity, integrity, mutuality and mobility (Johnson, 2013). I will discuss the intricacies of the dynamic process of capoeira as a relevant model for a therapeutic intervention with any population, but specifically



---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

with populations for whom conventional Western psychotherapy practices are neither available nor effective.

### *History of Capoeira*

Capoeira originated in Brazil in the 1600's, when African slaves disguised resistance fighting rehearsals by transforming them into dance. Most of the recorded evidence of the origins of capoeira has been lost or destroyed over the centuries, and as the art has prevailed, there have been countless attempts to revive it and link the current practice as accurately as possible to the original tradition of capoeira. It is believed that the slaves disguised their combat training as dance so that they could practice fighting techniques without arousing suspicion, and eventually revolt against their oppressors (Capoeira, 2002). Capoeira was essentially banned from the 1850's through the 1930's, when people were imprisoned for practicing. It is now the national sport of Brazil and has caught on internationally. It can be found in virtually every country in the world.

### *What is Capoeira?<sup>1</sup>*

The roda (pronounced “ho-dah”) is a circular playspace where the dance/fight/game (“jogo”) takes place. The players and spectators form a circle with an orchestra of musicians, usually led by the Mestre (capoeira Master) who conducts the game. The symbol of capoeira is the berimbau, a rhythmic instrument with a long wooden stick, kept in a bow shape by a taut wire, and a hollow gourd shell that resonates the tone at the bottom of the bow. The wire is tapped by a small stick and touched with a stone to produce distinct tones that set the mood and rhythm for the game. The berimbau is the leader of the bateria (orchestra)<sup>2</sup> (Capoeira, 2002).

The musical component differentiates capoeira from other martial arts. The speed, rhythm and energy of the music dictates the axé (energy) of the game. As the musicians play and sing, participants of the roda contribute their energy to the game by clapping and singing with the music (Capoeira, 2002). All participants exchange roles throughout a roda, transitioning between

---

<sup>1</sup> The main forms of capoeira are Capoeira Angola, and Capoeira Regional. Although there are multiple styles and schools of capoeira, for the purposes of this paper I will not differentiate among styles, but speak about the general components that are common to all forms.

<sup>2</sup> Other instruments traditionally played are a conga-like drum (*atabaquê*), a tambourine (*panedeiro*), a grooved cylindrical wooden instrument rubbed with a stick (*reco-reco*), and a 2-toned bell (*agogo*).

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

singing/playing instruments in the bateria, playing the game, and being part of the circle that generates the axé of the game. The leader of the roda often sings songs that either reflect the games being played, or songs that will push the players to shift the speed or intention of the game. Most songs (sung in Brazilian Portuguese) are in a call-and-response style.

### *Jogo: Playing the Game of Capoeira*

Joga - playing capoeira: A pair of capoeiristas crouch face to face at the foot of the bateria before entering the roda. They acknowledge the leader of the roda (usually the Mestre playing the berimbau) and the rest of the musicians, make eye contact, and then begin a back and forth jogo, communicating in embodied dialogue of attack and defense. The capoeiristas call and respond to one another, using skillful movement that reflects their structured training of learned forms, but they are completely spontaneous and improvise infinite combinations.

The ginga is the principal dance-step that a player first learns. It has a basic back-and-forth format, the player stepping to the side and back, blocking his face with his arm. The step is deceptively simple, but its performance, as individual in style as a person's walk, indicates a lot about the player. The unique nature of the ginga is part of the deception of the game: It hides the power of the attack within a dance step. Players practice a series of attacks, mostly in the form of kicks, and defenses to evade the attacks, such as crouching and lunging. Players also practice leg sweeps that are designed to take the opponent down, yet allow him to quickly re-compose and re-enter the game. Acrobatics (cartwheels, handstands, and fancy flips) are also part of the game, used either as attacks or defenses. These extra *florio* (fancy movements) add embellishments to the game that make it look more aesthetic and keep it interesting (Capoeira, 2002).

The capoeira game usually does not privilege defeating or knocking out the opponent, rather it emphasizes skill, connection and aesthetic form. The attacks are not intended to harm the other person: Kicks are often forewarned or perhaps slowed down before hitting the target, so a capoeirista can signal her dominance without actually injuring her opponent. Attaining dominance is often achieved through *malícia*, which is the trickiness, or malice, of the game. Nestor Capoeira (2006) describes *malícia* as:

the specific way the experienced player 'sees' and interacts with life, the world, and especially human beings....The capoeirista knows that...'the

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

vulture doesn't eat leaves;' he knows that evil and falsity exist....This knowledge of certain realities about life and people when applied to the game is the mysterious malícia of the capoeira player. (Capoeira, 2006, pp. 79-80)

Capoeiristas know that the world isn't always what it seems, that it contains uncertain and unstable elements. *Malandragem*, based on the concept of malícia, is an attitude of ambiguity or trickery in the game, and has its origins in Afro-Brazilian culture (Robitaille, 2010). Maladragem means the ability to manage tough situations ingeniously - not always in a fair way. Mestres have described this as “Pretending you go and not go,” and “When you think that he's here, he's behind you” (Robitaille, 2010). It represents all potentials of the scenario that are possible, but which may or may not be expressed, similar to the notion of the  $t'$  space in DvT. Masters of effective malandragem astutely sense, observe and anticipate moves and effective responses. Their sly movements develop into a fluid dance of tactics and movements that threaten but don't actually harm the opponent (Young & Schlie, 2011). This is very close to the restraint against harm in DvT.

This deep and complex aspect of capoeira also differentiates it from other martial arts and keeps the game playful and unpredictable. The purpose is not just to control the game with constant attacks and take-downs, but to respond to the other player effectively. The game is played with those safety factors in place, as well as the deception, trickery and playfulness of never having full knowledge of the other's actions, knowing that at any moment you can wobble, fall, and potentially get hurt. The encounter is meant to push the players to perform according to their maximum potential. Capoeiristas restrain themselves from harming, but the potential certainly exists both to harm and be hurt. Perceiving what is real is challenged by the addition of discrepant movements representing the potential for what could be. This leads to greater range of possibilities for being in the world, or dimensionalization in DvT terms. Playing at the borders of safety and harm is what connects capoeira to the practice of therapy.

Being part of the roda often feels like a spiritual experience and evokes an acute mindfulness of being alert and present in all senses. The energy of the room encourages the players to react and respond in a way that is true to themselves in that impermanent moment. Thoughts, feelings, and body sensations arise in the encounter and are played out with a specific person in a fleeting moment. For example, players may begin a friendly game with mutual agreement, allowing the

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

other person to see the attacks and get out of the way. Then one player may either suddenly trick the other and throw a surprise kick or take them off balance. In that moment both players will react. One may feel invincible and become more aggressive, the other may feel victimized and withdraw. Or one may feel shame and then offer himself to be taken down, and the other may feel the desire for revenge. Each reaction should be true for that player: capoeira provides a mirror for the person to reflect their true personality, in all its beauty and roughness. The roda is not a competition between you and the other: The greatest opponent in the game is yourself (Capoeira, 2006). Capoeira pushes your personal limits beyond your comfort zone. Often people will practice a challenging movement over and over in training alone and find it impossible, and then suddenly, when coaxed by their opponent in the roda, it unexpectedly manifests in the heat of the game.

Capoeiristas are by nature and by choice a different kind of individual who desire freedom at the deepest level of their being. A man once said: “if you want to be free, you just have to start being free.” Freedom is a state of mind and not a state of the body. We are part of this society and we will continue being part of it. However, we will also continue to grow in our greatness within that same society. No system or society can swallow an individual's greatness once that individual has come to consciously acknowledge that greatness and uniqueness.” Mestre Cobra Mansa (taken from <http://www.wesleyan.edu/wsa/capoeira/articlemanifesto.html>)

### *Therapeutic Applications*

Because capoeira is rooted in liberation from oppression, it can be a gateway to empowerment for oppressed communities (Burt & Butler, 2011), or for others who are enslaved in rigid states of being as a result of attempting to conform to the dominant culture. Burt & Butler (2011) suggest that the embodied active movements of martial arts, combined with therapeutic principles, make a significant difference in changing negative patterns for marginalized adolescents. Because capoeira is not about winning or losing per se, it provides a rich opportunity for self-reflection on behavior and actions. Anger and aggression will not advance the practice. One must develop new methods for achieving a goal in a high pressure situation, simultaneously engaging both higher level thinking and automatic body reactions. Burt & Butler (2011) cite the benefit of the interaction between the following elements of capoeira: the structured environment, the effect of interpersonal factors, the reduction in disconnection, the improvement in attachment, and the redirection of aggressive behaviors. Burt & Butler (2011)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

assert the effectiveness of capoeira as a form of therapy for adolescents from minority or marginalized communities who are resistant to traditional talk therapies.

Capoeira has already merged naturally with some perhaps lesser known group therapy practices. Somatherapy, a form of anarchistic therapy, was originally conceptualized by Roberto Freire in the 1970's. It employs active and creative games to explore authority, power, oppression, freedom, and individual attitudes towards sociopolitical issues. Capoeira (specifically Capoeira Angola) is a significant component, intentionally integrated into this revolutionary therapy as a way to “transform the way we perceive the world, re-build the body, its dwelling and livelihood” (Jorge, 2008). This work aims to build consciousness between the body, emotions and social behavior.

Capoeira provides an atmosphere of inclusion, acceptance, flexibility, caring, support, mentorship, and acceptance, especially for culturally diverse groups. Age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, physical stature, and socio-economic status all become inconsequential in the training and the game. This makes it a safe place for balanced physical and emotional self-expression, while cultivating respect and self control (Burt & Butler, 2011). By reducing social isolation and forming a cohesive community, capoeira satisfies the need for adolescent affiliation in a gang that provides positive adult mentorship, and a feeling that they are doing something of value for themselves and the community (Burt & Butler, 2011). Witnessing the awe-inspiring ways experienced capoeiristas and mestres move, twist, jump, kick, spin and flip is incentive for people to gain new skills and improve their own game. The power of positive role models for youth (and people of all ages) in the capoeira community cannot be overestimated (Twemlow & Sacco, 1998).

Capoeira provides valuable principles that I have been infusing into my practice of DvT with traumatized children, including playfighting that does not result in actual harm, the physical call and response, spontaneity, re-engaging in play, trust and the physical challenge. As mentioned earlier, essential components of the capoeira game are the witnesses who not only watch the game, but also provide the axé: energetic singing, clapping, and encouragement for players to engage in the game.

For the past 3 years, I have been training with a teenage boy in our academy who has a developmental disability and is basically nonverbal. He has supportive family members who bring him to practice three times a week. He

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

gracefully interacts through his body with the practitioners and engages in the roda, understanding the ritual, the calls and responses, kicks and defenses. When he cartwheels in the roda, he jumps up with his arm in the air and shouts out “whoohoo!” with a huge grin on his face. When we sing, he opens his mouth wide and hums along when we clap he joins in with his own rhythm. He has far surpassed what any of us had expected of him and he continues to surprise us when he learns how to spin a new kick or performs the steps to a more complicated sequence. He has found his community.

### *The Principles of DvT in Capoeira*

One of the key principles of DvT is the assumption that the world is unstable, and playing with the instability allows clients to grow and transform. However, the inevitable and universal instability of life is destabilizing for most of us, so we attempt to brace our lives by locking onto thoughts, behaviors, roles, beliefs and values that feel comfortable and safe.

Capoeira also plays with the instability between people and within the self. You can practice kicks and sequences, execute acrobatics beautifully and be in top athletic shape. But then you enter the roda with another person with his own formations, thoughts, body and freedom. Whether the other player is a beginner or most advanced, you never know how you will play until the moment you jump (or cartwheel, or flip) into the center of the circle. The instability mounts as your assumptions about the other are confronted; when you allow yourself to stop those thoughts (or not) and simply respond. You know all the while that you are in the playspace, but your friend can swipe you off your feet in the blink of an eye – whether that moment is your most vulnerable mistake, or your most confident kick. Of course you train with serious determination and intention to outsmart your friend and defend yourself, but the game is over if you lose your ability to remain in play.

DvT helps us understand that it is only in the encounter with another person that we are challenged to face ourselves (Johnson, 2009). The other has a physical and energetic presence that may fit with, or oppose, our particular energy. In the encounter we can engage with the other from a place of rigid coping strategies, or we have the option to accept the other person’s offer, adapt ourselves to new ways, and transform.

The encounter in the capoeira roda is a pivotal place. One can choose to play it safe and play out familiar patterns of movement, or reactions to the other.

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

One can stay in the persona of the fighter, the trickster, the victim, or the caretaker. But with each new game, one's patterns are pushed and eventually broken down. Every game is not only a new opportunity to expand personal (physical and behavioral) boundaries, but when one remains in the practice, each game is like a continuation of the last. So essentially one plays an ongoing continuous game, mirroring the natural cycle of life and personal growth.

Capoeira puts people face to face in battle, in the safe container, bounded by explicit and implicit rules. The encounter in a therapeutic milieu is the starting point for repair, for people to learn that intimate encounters are safe again, that harm is not inevitable. The encounter in capoeira teaches that negotiation is possible, and that you do have control over your response. Capoeira embodies a fine line between fight and dance and requires participants to engage in an “aesthetic means of negotiating” (Young & Schlie, 2011), as mutual partners in a physical negotiation; rather than in a power-based competition that ends in domination and subordination. As Young & Schlie (2011) write, “It is difficult to truly dislike those with whom we have shared a dance” (p. 203).

The boundaries of the DvT playspace open up endless possibilities for growth and change to occur. The DvT practitioner is trained to respond in the moment to the client to meet her in the stuck places, or else to challenge the client to push her boundaries to see the same situation from a new/discrepant perspective. The therapist pushes the client to go beyond the limits of her perceived body, mind, or familiar narrative. Similarly, in the capoeira, typically the Mestre or leader of the roda will guide the music to the speed or style of game. The role of the players is to regulate themselves through their conversation. But because any game can go over the line from playing to fighting (especially if egos or bodies get bruised), the Mestre is there as an external witness, to push the players to expand their limits, or end the game if he senses it has escalated beyond repair.

In the roda you play back and forth as both the player and the playobject. When you are kicked, outsmarted, or knocked down by the other player in capoeira, you can choose to hit back harder, faster or throw fancy kicks to not appear weak. Alternatively, you can pretend to keep cool, and try to outsmart the other by taking him down in the next move with a sneaky swipe and get your revenge (in *malandragem* style). The goal is also not to be passive or polite, but to accept the given situation and play with it. You learn quickly to get over

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

insecurities, and loosen rigidities of role or self-conceptualization. Poised on a humbling fine line, players must find the optimal balance to deal with arrogance, power, and anger in a playful and nonviolent way. This pulsating balance provides the space to expand in mental, physical and spiritual growth.

This is similar to the DvT concept of variation, the “movement of the senses back and forth across a divide of difference” (Johnson, 2013) in the form of play. The constant exploration of repeating and non-repeating elements of movement/action motivates us to adapt to change, expands our perception, and dimensionalizes our consciousness, which ultimately results in a “more complex and dynamic representation of the world” (Johnson, 2013). Similarly, the *ginga*, the kicks and the defenses of capoeira are standard movements, but each person adds a slight variation on each movement, and the way the movements are combined is the unpredictable factor that brings a delightful sense of awe to the performative experience. Slowing down a game, breathing and adding the subtle playful gestures reminds the other person that this is the playspace.

### *Conclusion*

The African slaves in Brazil over 400 years ago were seeking freedom and liberation - not only literal freedom from physical enslavement, but freedom of mind and spirit. Capoeira was born as a result. The history of capoeira as a subversive practice to overcome oppression is the basis for the potential use of capoeira as a therapeutic endeavor for marginalized populations. Capoeira is historically rooted in the large social, intergenerational, and historical traumatic event of slavery. Groups catalyzed their innate knowledge to work through the oppression and trauma via an embodied method that allowed for embodied release, sensory processing, physical and mental power, and ultimately transformation. It empowered otherwise helpless enslaved individuals to stand up for themselves and find truly creative survival and healing solutions for severely harmful conditions.

One of the most important teachings of capoeira, “not to be afraid of being afraid,” is the same as the primary purpose of DvT, to decrease one’s fear of the instability of Being. Expanding the physical body and encountering the other in the game-fight are powerful factors that make capoeira a holistic and expansive experience. Safe expression of the fight strengthens the boundary between safety and danger and increases tolerance for instability. One’s power lies in expecting the unexpected and preparing to be kicked, even if the kick never comes – then



---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

having the ability to let it all go. Moving and playing with others, whether in the roda or the DvT playspace, allows me to remember my potential and have a more tolerant and healthy understanding of myself in relation to others. And sometimes a foot to my face or a legitimate take-down to the ground is a humbling reminder to open my eyes, stay alert in the present moment and remember to awaken to the call of this life.

### References

- Burt, I. & Butler, K. (2011). Capoeira as a clinical intervention: Addressing adolescent aggression with Brazilian martial arts. *American Counseling Association*, 39, 48-57.
- Capoeira, N. (2002). *Capoeira: Roots of the dance-fight-game*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Capoeira, N. (2006). *A street-smart song: Capoeira philosophy and inner life*. Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books.
- Johnson, D. R. (2009). Developmental Transformations: Towards the body as resence. In D. R. Johnson & R. Emunah. (Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy*, (pp. 89-116). Springfield, IL. Charles C. Thomas Publisher.
- Johnson, D. R. (2013). *Text for Practitioners 2*. New Haven, CT: Institute for Developmental Transformations.
- Jorge, G. (2008). "Soma, an Anarchistic Experiment." Retrieved from [http://estudosdesoma.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Soma-an-anarchist-experiment\\_Jorge-Goia.pdf](http://estudosdesoma.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Soma-an-anarchist-experiment_Jorge-Goia.pdf).
- Robitaille, L. (2010). Understanding capoeira through cultural theories of the body. Baptista Prizewinning Essay, York University. Retrieved from: <http://www.yorku.ca/cerlac/Robitaille.pdf>.
- Twemlow, S. W. & Sacco, F. C. (1998). The application of traditional martial arts practice and theory to the treatment of violent adolescents. *Adolescence*, 33, 505-518.
- Young, M., & Schlie, E. (2011). The rhythm of the deal: Negotiation as a dance. *Negotiation Journal*, 191-204. President and Fellows of Harvard College.

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

---

Commentary on

“Capoeira and Developmental Transformations”

Adam Reynolds<sup>1</sup>

Mira’s article about Capoeira and DvT powerfully evokes the issue of risk and harm in the playspace. Each time I have witnessed the capoeira troupe with their spinning, cartwheeling bodies I have felt the close and distant tremor of risk, consisting of both great desire and aversion to join in. The anxiety I felt about rolling my own cartwheels in the *roda* is reminiscent of that initial trembling when I entered the unfamiliar territory of the playspace for the first time. Within the DvT playspace I have had the chance to explore my own fears of, and desire for, violence with many bodies: the glee at playing out a vicious attack, the fear of running for your life, the sensation of pushing against a body for real and finding out who is stronger. I have taken on the roles of murderer, perpetrator, oppressor – and these roles press against the internalized shapes of my own sense of power and aggression: the ways in which I am hostile, defensive, competitive.

This risk when two bodies are thrown together is familiar to DvT play: the dance of feint and block, or faithful and divergent rendering, while we are both exposed and connected. And yes, accidents happen – in DvT and in capoeira – with bruises, rug-burns, sprains being the visible signs, and wounded pride, hurt feelings, unspoken truths being the hidden, inner scars. Isn’t there always a dance, a *roda*, as the dramatic contact between playors determines who is faster, who is stronger, who is more clever? Thus I was curious to read about the concepts of *Malicia* and *Malandragem*, and the role that trickery and uncertainty occupy within capoeira– for in many ways DvT seeks to upend the client’s tortured stability and ideas about relationships. Indeed variation may be just another form of sleight of hand.

---

<sup>1</sup> Published March 1, 2015. Adam Reynolds, MFA, LCSW, RDT-BCT is on the Clinical Faculty, Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work; Co-Director, New York DvT Institute. [adamreynolds@gmail.com](mailto:adamreynolds@gmail.com)

---

## *A Chest of Broken Toys*

Capoeira's roots are important: The rhythms and rituals of the *roda* carry the deep scars of oppression, slavery, and physical violence. The threat was real: practitioners of capoeira had to post lookouts to protect them from arrest and punishment. Capoeira puts practice into a social context, seeking humane ways to be in a community facing violence and injustice. At the same time, the game of capoeira embraces a repetition that challenges the comparison to DvT: Are the repeated forms of the game remnants of the power and privilege of the system that capoeira evolved to resist? Does capoeira seek to transform the self in relation to the society, or merely to overcome the oppression? Mira's article raises the question whether DvT may be more martial art than we have imagined, as players literally fight for their freedom against a repressive society, through play. This is a profoundly different core image than "letting go." This tension between different perspectives is one benefit of comparing DvT with near-practices such as capoeira.