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Abstract

The authors present a play in three acts that we hope speaks for itself on some level. While we recognize that context is important, we do believe in the power in audience interpretation of a work of art. For more information, please refer to the prologue.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Method Acting

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Method as Method: A Play in Three Acts

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The authors present a play in three acts that we hope speaks for itself on some level. While we recognize that context is important, we do believe in the power in audience interpretation of a work of art. For more information, please refer to the prologue. Keywords: Qualitative Research, Method Acting

“What can method acting tell us about research methods?” This was a question I (Gabe) posed to Sam a few months before we began writing the play of which you are about to read or (hopefully) perform. This question came out several previous conversations between the two of us where we discussed the recent turns in qualitative research and our shared love of theatre and acting on the stage. From my perspective, I was intrigued by possible places of exploration between acting and research. I thought the shared word of “method” between method acting and qualitative methods could prove productive in wrestling with some of the questions raised by a post-qualitative turn.

From my memory, our discussions moved quickly past the traditional academic avenues of exploring this connection towards an arts-based approach in which we would write a play that we would then perform. Each year from 2016 to 2018, we have written an act of this play and performed it at the Annual Bergamo Conference of Curriculum Theorizing and Classroom Practice, all the while revising the piece with an eye for publication.

Our attempt here recognizes other examples and discussions of arts-based research, while at the same time it represents a unique approach to what we, at the time, saw as specific to the conversations between the two of us. In other words, we were improvising how we wrote this play by design. When we decided to write a play rather than a journal article we started, as intentionally as we could, with the simple idea of “let’s write a play about research methods.” To that end, we worked on the play separately so that we could both be quarantined from the other’s intent and merely react to the words we saw on the page. We did this by working over a shared Google Document in which we would write sections separately and in no preconceived order. I began the document with something similar to the stage directions in italics you will read in Act One and Sam then followed suit with the lines of the monologue. This process continued organically through Act II. In Act III, this changed as I wrote most of the act (both stage directions and dialogue) and then Sam took a second pass of the draft. To that end, we are writing separate introductions to this play.

My interpretation of this process was to see if a “method-less” playwriting process, the conventions of traditional playwriting notwithstanding, freed us to really consider research methods in a more abstract way. Of course, I had ideas that I was trying to communicate on the page in the lines that I wrote, but I never shared my intentions with Sam nor he with me. Again, my interpretation of the reasoning for this was that we had talked enough about research methods, let’s see what happens when we let the play do our speaking for us. Since we performed the acts of this play at an academic conference, there were opportunities for us to discuss our intentions with each other and those in the room attending our session, but these

introductions are the first time since we wrote the play that we are sharing our full intentions with each other.

The prologue below was our first attempt at doing what we now are trying in these introductions. We hoped that we could “let the play speak for itself”. As we moved this play towards publication and with the help of some very helpful reviewers and editors, we conceded that our prologue, as clever as it might be, might be insufficient. So, with a bit of trepidation in writing these words, let me share the ideas of which I was engaging when I wrote my part of this play. As a qualitative researcher who has written about method and the implications of the scholarship that has been termed post-qualitative (Huddleston, 2018), I saw play-writing as an opportunity to explore the relationship between method and the researcher. In other words, what is the positionality of a researcher in relation to the scholarship that gives us what have come to understand as “method” for qualitative researcher? Moreover, does the researcher have agency when it comes to using these “methods” or are we simply subject to them similar to how Foucault (1972, 1977, 2006) posits knowledge-as-power operating in society. To explore this dynamic, I saw (at least initially) the stage directions of our play a metaphor for research methods with Sam representing the qualitative researcher. With this as the premise, I wondered what would happen if the researcher tried to speak to the methods and vice versa. Was it possible for disembodied qualitative methods to trade places, so to speak, with a qualitative researcher? Would they want to? And, if they did, what would happen? Whether I answered these questions or not, I leave partly up to the readers and the audiences of this play and the other part I will attempt to answer in our concluding discussion section at the end of this play. To give you another peek behind the curtain, I am waiting to write my parts of the conclusion until after I read and process Sam’s introduction that follows mine.

Speaking for myself (Sam), I disagree with the editor, reviewers, and Gabe that we should write this introduction and I am even opposed to the prologue. I understand, of course, why it is asked for, but I see these reasons as symptomatic of the fact that qualitative social science seems to think it can have its cake and eat it too. What I mean by invoking this expression is that qualitative social science researchers seem to, on the one hand, insist that their scientific work can be judged according to criteria that have equal value to other forms of social science and, on the other, desire to break free from scientific conventions altogether and adopt the freedom to be found in the art and humanities. On my view, the genre of the play belongs in the latter, not the former. Its presentation here, in a journal of qualitative social science, only serves to make the general point that perhaps qualitative research cannot serve two masters. There are empirical complications with this view, I realize. For instance, just as the natural and physical sciences rely on the abstract art of mathematics, so too can we find mixed and applied uses of the social sciences in the arts and humanities. In fields like history, the split between humanistic and scientific historians is more evidence that the neat divisions one might like to see applied, based on abstract principles, are never so simple. So maybe I am wrong about this point. At the same time, the idea of “method acting” and other ideas about method in the fine and performing arts are hardly inconsequential and they operate outside of the purview of the natural, applied, and social sciences entirely. Right or wrong, I know that Gabe and I share a love of letters and of the stage. We both have had formative experiences with the fine and performing arts, especially the theatre. In my case, the first potential routes for my studies after high school were the seminary or acting school. I ended up studying philosophy and literature instead. We also share a fascination with the idea of method acting and wondered if that idea might have anything to say about the disputes about method that abound today in educational research.

However, the most honest way to understand this play is that it emerges from two colleagues and friends in a field where the social sciences and humanities share company who decided to try and write a play as a way to make sense of some things. Reading or performing

this play in this way should yield its own rewards. Whether it relates to other things or even to the things we tried to address here is a demand that the arts cannot be burdened by. In the end, you, the reader, must use your own intelligence and decide.

PROLOGUE

Author 2: Over the past two years we have been writing and performing a play titled “Method as Method,” which will be hard to introduce or summarize since the play itself and, more importantly, the performance of the play itself, is the real point. So, if you are reading this, you should grab a partner and read it aloud. It started with Author 1 writing the italicized parts and I wrote the character’s monologues. Since then, we have both worked on the entire script, adding and changing in a shared Google document when we could. Without abstracting too much, it was meant to address the ongoing conversation about method, methodology, post-qualitative research, arts and humanities-based research, and that sort of thing. Our conversations began with this question, “What can theatre and acting tell us about qualitative methods?” We have performed versions of all three acts at the Bergamo Conference of Curriculum Theorizing and Classroom Practice in 2016, 2017, 2018.

Author 1: Don’t you think that’s too terse and cheeky?

Author 2: You stole that line from the Twitter conversation we had the other day.

Author 1: They don’t know that.

Author 2: Now they do. So, what would you suggest?

Author 1: Well, I would explain that the point of writing a play is an experiment in form—pushing against notions of what research is and can be. So, the play is both a discussion and an example of post-qualitative research (Lather, 2013; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; MacLure, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011, 2013, 2014). More specifically, considering post-qualitative research vis-à-vis method acting (see Hirsch, 2002).

Author 2: What was that?

Author 1: What was what?

Author 2: All that crap in the parenthesis?

Author 1: A citation.

Author 2: Okay, first of all, I’m not sure that I signed up for “post-qualitative research,” whatever the hell that means—I’m more into pre-qualitative research—and second, how are we supposed to play with form if you insert citations in a dialogue?

Author 1: Think of it as stage directions for academics.

Author 2: No, I won’t.

Author 1: Look, we can’t just submit something, be it a conference proposal or a journal submission, without at least acknowledging the traditional forms of both. At Bergamo we could

somewhat get away with it because we see this as an extension of the "complicated conversation" (see Pinar, 1999, 2004, 2012; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008) which allows for a broad exploration of theory and form.

Author 2: You did it again! And this time you were really sneaky because you stuck it in the middle of the sentence. Plus, I don't see what is so traditional about using a citation method invented by the American Psychological Association in the middle of the 20th century. Poetry, verse, song, story: these are traditional in the sense of being old and ancient.

Author 1: Ok. I'll stop. (pause)

Author 1: You know, you bring up a good point though in that the materiality of the dialogue itself, words on paper, the ink, the font, etc. furthers this as an experimentation of form and therefore speaks to the possibility of how the recent scholarship dubbed new materialism (Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012) potentially influences my work on this piece.

Author 2: NO. No, no, no, no, no. This is not an experiment. Plays exists going back for thousands of years. Social science is an experiment, not arts and humanities.

Author 1:oooookay. Forget I said anything.

(pause)

Author 2: So now what?

Author 1: We wait.

Author 2: For what?

Author 1: To be either accepted or rejected.

Author 2: Ahh. I see.

(pause)

Author 1: Now this is a blatant rip off of a combination of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead and Waiting for Godot.

Author 2: They don't know that.

Author 1: They do now.

(pause)

Author 2: Is there a reference list at the end of this prologue?

Author 1: Nope. (Exits stage left, Author 2 sits and waits.)

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Author 2: Shit.

ACT I

The scene begins with a presenter seated at a table in a room full of people. The room is plain. It retains a definite feel all the same. The presenter looks around. He knows he must speak now. His talk is meant to be a paper discussing the use of method acting in (post)qualitative research and curriculum theorizing. He starts to speak but stops short, as if vaguely aware of another voice. Is it his own? Is it someone else's in the room? Someone that is not in the room? These questions create a sense of panic. He wonders if others are waiting on him or vice versa. He begins to wonder if the paper topic has caused a crisis of representation. Is he truly a presenter at this conference or is he portraying one in a play? If it is the former, he is sure others are staring at him with a mix of fear and sadness. If it is the latter, does he need to bring his own life in to present a realistic portrayal? Does he need to remember his past, his own

experiences of presenting at conferences? He decides the questions must stop and he must speak. He begins:

Drama is not dramatic. (What a terrible first line.) Otherwise, we lose the bareness and smell of it all. Just say the lines, read them out. Project, focus on your body and let the spirit do the work. Breathing is a given, but on the stage it is more. The voice projects through breath, through flesh and fiber, over tongue and between teeth, out into space. You let it hit the wall and bounce back. Method acting begins with *ruah*: the spirit of breath.

Bodies do not last long without breathing. Embodiment is great, fleshy, and sweaty but we exaggerate when we forget the immateriality of breathing and other energetic forces. Chemical gravity. Acting, which is all method acting is, is certainly embodied, but it is not a *total* material embodiment. What Marx did to Hegel's sense of history may be worse than the fact that he accidentally founded the field of sociology before Dubois could make it interesting. The method of method acting is no more nor less than to hold on to as much of the whole without losing the parts.

BANG! A loud noise interrupts his thought. What was that? Did they hear it? He looks down at his paper to gather himself, but he still hears the voice. Does he wait for a pause and resume speaking or does he allow the voice to continue? He was on to something here. Method acting is not necessarily about a predetermined "method" per se. Strasberg seemed to be making up most of it on the fly and Brando talked of it in vague generalities without a discernible "method" to speak of. Wait, how would he know that? Was he at the actor's studio? Focus, he takes a deep breath and decides to try and stop the other voice by saying:

Memory-work works by rote. Breathing through a body cannot be mindless. So there is consciousness, recitation. *Intentional* consciousness, in the phenomenological sense, object directedness. Not just words, but words directed *at* something. Performance is what we find where there is attention. Pull your attention into my picture, into my story of the bear that awoke as a fox, and you'll get the point. The words take flesh and spirit through reason and repetition. Affect matters, sure. But, again, there is something less dramatic to drama that mustn't miss the words and their punctuation. Every line. Every single pause and punctuation.

Read the lines. Not between the lines. Not outside the lines. Not what is missing. Just the simple lines. Back to the lines themselves. Believe in them. Believe them. Method acting requires faith.

An audience member coughs. This breaks his concentration. Is this what he wants to say? Is he making sense? Too much sense? He scans the audience to search for reactions and is met with faces. They are too complex to read right now. Thoughts swirl in their heads or maybe in his? Again, questions of whose voice is audible and what I...he hears. The thread is lost and he wonders if he can get it back. Try to remember, you need to remember. Find some ground. Boal? Lather? St. Pierre? Pacino? Pino Paladino? Strasberg? Stravinsky? Brando? The names ring bells, but none...wait, Brando. That seems to be a lifeline rope, think to Apocalypse Now and the documentary about its filming...Hearts of Darkness? No, not it, all I can...I mean he...can think is Brando saying, "I swallowed a bug." We have to think why we are doing this, the question. Right. How is the actor the researcher and vice versa? The "how" always saves the day. He starts again:

Time is relative, but an absolutist relative, like Einstein's relativity. Waiting and starting are not afraid to be jerky. (Jerky? Really? You're just paranoid. Your voice is not like in the movies.) Awkwardness is always there. The actor—"Who is the actor?" is not a question to the actor, to this actor, maybe, but not to THE actor—the actor, I said, is always awkward, especially when too self-possessed. Method actors kill themselves, but not like Socrates. They just kill themselves.

Working carefully is thoughtful work, not ponderous, unless pondering, not hasty unless in haste, not this or that unless this or that. Gil Scott-Heron said it: "And then laying there, bleeding like a stuck pig. Was a stuck pig." That is the thing. The poetics of method in method acting are the essentials: pencil, papers, tobacco, rug, horses, matches and marbles. Time, leather, harmonica melodies.

Something catches his eye and he stops again. Is this a Brechtian moment? A Pirandello play? Pasolini? Now he remembers, no we remember. It wasn't Brando that started him down this path, it was the apocryphal tale of Hoffman and Oliver when the latter said, "Try acting, my boy" or something to that effect. The point was set up as a conditional statement: IF post qualitative research is trying to break method THEN what can method acting teach us about it? Before Strasberg and his school, acting was in the technique, it was in the doing. Method acting was in the remembering, in the connecting of moments between the lives of the actor and lives of the characters. Strictly representational. And yet, there was still a technique to it, but the technique was no longer in the performance; it was how to go on a journey of connections, how to make the immaterial material. Not object oriented material or agential beings, just material, like stuff to act out or to play at the gig. You hope you have enough. This is the crux of your argument, I am saying this to you now, you must keep this in mind and start again:

Research sounds too damn smart for me. I only wanted to be a mediocre scholar, and maybe get a shot at writing something important someday. Sor Juana Ines paid a price for her mind and today it is more expensive than Vancouver real estate. If I search and then re-search and then re-re-search I might be better off finding something else instead and moving on with my life. All this searching sounds like a tortured game of hide and go seek, sometimes. Lifelong learning can be an eternal prison sentence. Who really wants to learn all the time?

This time another panel member drops something on the floor, breaking his concentration. He's lost again. We are lost again. The thread is lost and there is nothing to do to get it back. Maybe I should stand he thinks. He pushes back in his chair, but thinks better of it. At the same time, he's made a conscious effort to ignore the voice and continue his thoughts, but this time the voice continues speaking.

[Said concurrently with below. Actor should finish before: Imagine asking Susan Sontag while she is verbally assaulting Norman Mailer what her method is?]

We are both born free of and restricted by language and when we talk of qualitative "methods" it is the same. If it isn't data, then what is it? That sounds familiar and I think it was said in this very same building years ago. But, as St. Pierre notes, to pay attention to the theories born out of post-structuralism, critical theory, feminism, Marxism, and cultural studies is to question the very methods we have been told to use. Is this the other connection to method acting? This new generation was trying to say that it isn't about technique, it's about communicating raw emotion, it's about screaming "Stella" at the top of your lungs and meaning it. It's about the

confluence of you and your character in communion with the audience, it is about being free and restricted at the same time. It is about portraying real emotion on the artifice of a stage, in a theatre, for the 300 hundredth time, but it still seems to connect to something. I can no longer compete, we are onto something here, we must keep talking.

I am sitting in my airplane seat. I put on my seatbelt. I pull out a book a student gave me the night before, an Iranian side-by-side translation of selections of Rumi's spiritual poetry. The front cover has the beautiful form of Arabic, Farsi, and other Middle Eastern fonts. I am sitting in the exit aisle. I realize that my complexion doesn't exactly inspire confidence in the gentleman seated next to me. I freeze. If I put the book away that might look shady. But I want to read some poetry. So I do. I love the stanzas about Jesus most. Maybe if my neighbor sees that I am reading about Jesus through the homoerotic pen of a Sufi mystic he will feel better. Hardly. I feel sleepy and so I sleep. Who knows what happens then, as Rumi rests in my lap, barely held by unconscious hands covered in itchy psoriasis. I awake and watch most of an HBO documentary on the 50 year history of *The New York Review of Books*. It is celebratory and I like it. It reminds me of the intellectual culture I cherish in *The Paris Review*. I imagine that maybe the two staffs go to each other's parties. New York City evokes in me the bridge of Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City" from his 1973 classic *Innervisions*: "Skyscrapers and everything."

Writing and letters, books and essays, emails, Tweets and Facebook posts, blogs and the occasional hand-written letter, lectures and readings: Where has it all gone? Does the social scientist think their method will somehow accomplish this? The New Journalism of the Beats — or was it *from* the Beats? — anyway, the New Journalism that followed the Beats: the style, wit, verve, transgression, and classic line breaks and perfect grammar. Kendrick Lamar interrupts, dropping notes about grandpa's gin and Denzel and that the truth will set you free and the messiah and washed hands, said grace and more. I prefer Ellison, but Thundercat is a compelling bassist. The point I am making here is about composition. Hopefully that much is clear. There is composition and then there is decomposition. Method as a subject matter is decomposed.

Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, a book methodologists often don't read for bad reasons and that method actors also don't read for fantastic reasons, proves the decomposition of method especially when distinguished with his *Meditations on the Existence of God*. Today we have the new methodological Cartesians trying to do philosophy as method again. I favor the *Meditations* instead, which leads to the scholastic soul: Fine arts and literary culture, the editorial work of typesetting and design, a palace of paper and smoky freedom where method has no time to become explicitly decomposed. Imagine asking Susan Sontag while she is verbally assaulting Norman Mailer what her method is?

He stops as the last sentence seemed to crystallize what he was saying. Could it be that another aspect of method acting is the lore? The mythology? The idea that these imperfect artists sometimes achieve moments of clarity through a process as mysterious as alchemy. Maybe that's why the discussion about method acting focuses on the stories told...maybe, it's listening to Dustin Hoffman talk about Olivier and crying. Two actors from opposite approaches that connected so deeply, that's all that mattered. He decides to finish, it is time to finish. He starts for the last time. He looks around the room, did he connect? What is everyone thinking? Will we continue to talk? This is a fleeting moment, but the potentiality of method acting teaching us about what we DO with method still remains. He smiles. I smile. He starts, again:

I watched closely and studied the script, I read the lines and tried to let them seep into my chest—this is not chess—into my breast and my lungs. There is no opening, middle, and end. It is more composed than chronology. Linearity is vastly and sorely and evidently underrated these days. Lines stretch out eternal, with no beginning and no end. The line is infinite. Respect and love the lines. The methodology, ontology, epistemology, theoretical frame that doesn't do any work, the sections, chapters, data, affect, old new materialisms, the entire project of social science that is now moving into a stand-up self parody doesn't have a method; it has the ever present absence of one, a decomposed melody that cannot harmonize or syncopate, which is why it has so much to say about method decomposed into so many handbooks.

Method acting should not talk too much about itself otherwise it risks the same decomposition. So I'll think about it a while... Now that I think about it, acting is reducible to the atomic element of the writer. There is your method, decomposed into literary composition. So drop the method and work on the prose, the chops, and, like Rakim, *Don't Sweat the Technique*.

ACT II

The scene opens with the presenter at a table by himself. He is no longer in a room with others. He finds himself on a bare stage with a table, his laptop, and a stack of books. His former attendees of the last scene have left. He looks around and is vaguely aware of a larger, non-descript audience somewhere beyond the lights that he has just now noticed. The change in scene has disrupted his train of thought, but he is grasping onto the last thread. The actor, at her atomic level is the writer, or the playwright. The words on the page are what is most important, even if they are simply a guide and the actor is allowed to improvise. Sometimes they are so much more. Think of Shakespeare, the clues were not only in the words, but in the rhythm of the words, the ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM of the lines offered the actors clues into the character psyche. When there were extra beats in a line it meant that the characters was state was erratic, or at the very least, not calm and steady. There is a reason that "To be or not to be, that is the question" has an extra syllable, all is not well in the state of Denmark after all. Did method actors think the script was so important? The short answer is yes. The script was a place for the actor to work within the margins, to identify the beats, the moves, the pauses and literally mark the script up with her notes. Those notes, in turn, would be used to offer connective points to her own identity, a whole other process, but he doesn't want to deal with this now. He looks to the stack of books and starts to go through them in silence.

(pause)

But is there really silence? He continues to make out a voice, however faint, in the distance. The voice sounds similar to the one he heard previously, but it isn't as loud. Before the voice was almost right next to him, but now it seems as though it is off beyond the lights. He makes a choice, he will speak out loud, even though he is seemingly alone. He will try to speak to an unidentifiable group of people beyond the lights first and then maybe try to call out the voice he hears beyond them.

Good morning! Good morning to you, scholars, researchers, teachers, bandits, activists, messianic graduate students, sage wisdom speakers, far off and out institutions of the hour. Good morning to you!

I left the train station on the tenure track long enough to remember—or perhaps soon enough to remember?—I, too, was brought here almost a decade ago by one of the theorists to talk about Foucault and I didn't talk about power outages or how I am dazed and confused at the Holiday Inn Express. No, I spoke of William James and I used the word “curriculum” as many times as I could muster and fluster and conjugate the *currere* verb into a complicated conversational cliché that I didn't yet understand. The word became mesh. It is morning now, dear beloved lost ones, vampires on the beach, pilgrims seeking salt and sand and something that might stick to the soul.

I am searching for you, too, oh distant cousins and close strangers. I call, like you, in the insecurities of my name tagged affiliations that long for friendship. Are you lonely, too? Is this valley of research and tears as boring and lacking in consolation as it seems? Or maybe you are the therapeutic class of preachers, pole vaulting in the woke Olympics, calling all to join the salvation glory of the Great Awakening to those two words—social justice—invented by that Italian priest of the Society of Jesus in the 19th century. Maybe you seek and save the lost and pity my agnosticism. So be it. I call to you, too.

I wandered down a hallway last year and heard one of you explain how there are no Black or Brown philosophers of education. The implications of that explanation are true. The sociological instruments of graphic ethnographies within the qualitative/quantitative/mixed-method Trinity, served with all the post sauces imaginable, require worship and honour and thanksgiving. We must feed the gods, this much I understand. One cannot pull the plug out of the outlet. After all, when the electricity is gone, we end up dazed and confused at the Holiday Inn Express, after a sixty dollar taxi ride in the rain. No. We cannot do that. But we can pretend and even fantasize about it.

Imagine: the world before the turn and the post, the movement that generates so much dead literature, the stake driven into the corpse of modernity, to see if it would grow some leaves and give us new fruit. Imagine this world of thinking before theory and look at its workers, look closely, see that what they do that is the Author *1e*. It is the same flesh and bone, the same blood and ink, the same fibres and pages, the same spirit and tongue, the same fear and terror, the same love, the same devotion, or maybe that is the difference.

Tell me, morning greeters out there: Do you love this work? Would you devote yourself to it in the way the artist who does not eat or sleep or have health insurance not because she loves her art but because life without it would be a recipe for suicide? Tell me, researchers out there, what are you really looking for? Do astrologers like Jerry Springer and Dr. Oz really have anything different to offer? Tell me, preachers and revivalists, does your living water come with alcohol, what magic is it laced with? Do any of you, do any of us, does anyone love anything at all, are we capable of it anymore, do our words carry any greasy marks of transcendence in their guts or on our hot breathe?

I think I need CPR. Cardiac Pulmonary Reasons. Reasons for my heart to beat in 4/4, to pulse and resound in my stomach as I lay down to sleep. Sing me a lullaby like this and I will be your abd, your servant, your beloved. Reasons for these two lungs to fill and empty, like the bags that save the earth from plastic, to fill and empty with spirit and sometimes smoke in a rhythm that can afford more breaks than the heart organ. Breath to me a melody of this soulful sort, and I will be your friend, your apostle.

BUT YOU! YOU. THE ONE THAT HAUNTS THEM! YOU BEYOND AND BENEATH THE FELLOWSHIP! YOU OUT THERE. Or is it you IN THERE? No. It is you in here. Both. You out there and you in here. I am talking to you, I am addressing myself.

“This might actually work” he thinks to himself. But is he sure of the objectives? Of what he hopes to accomplish here? There is no ambiguity anymore, he has called the audience out. He knows they are there and he knows they know he knows they are there. Now that he have cleared all of this ambiguity out of the way, he can be less ambivalent about this voice that drones on in the distance. At first he thought that he hated this voice, but now he knows he must love it in order to bring it into the open. He thinks back to the to another time he heard this voice before. He was in a long, brightly lit hallway. This is helping because now he can place the voice directly in front of him, here. He puts his hand out in front of himself, at about waist height. Was the voice a child? No, that doesn’t make sense. The voice was sitting, he was standing. The voice was talking to me, he thinks. We were talking together. We were talking to each other and across each other...but we were talking. In fact, the beauty of this conversation from that moment so long ago was that we fundamentally did not agree on the premise of the conversation and yet, we agreed wholeheartedly about the nature of the world. How is this even possible? How could two people simultaneously agree and disagree? In thinking back, in recollecting, he realized that was the beauty of the talk, it seemed the problems could be solved. But what were the problems? “Ok, so now,” he thinks, “my goal is twofold: to bring out the voice and to figure out the problems they will solve together.” First things first. He surveys his surroundings. He looks back out at the audience, reminding them that HE KNOWS. He walks around the stage...(he starts quickly)...slowly...he takes in the surroundings and decides that his next steps...are....towards (a long pause).....center stage. He takes center stage and looks around. Next steps...next steps are actually no steps at all first, he has to get this voice to shut up. He yells:

Shut up! Will you please shut up!

It didn’t work, he must yell louder.

Just listen to me will you? Please will you shut the fuck up?

(Long pause)

It still didn’t work. Maybe it’s to walk and talk at the same time.

He takes a step to the right and yells: Shut up!

He takes a step to the right and yells: Shut up!

He takes a step to the right and yells: Shut up!

He takes a step to the right and yells: Shut up!

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He takes a step to the right and yells: Shut up!

He takes a step to the right and yells: Shut up!

He takes a step to the right and yells: Shut up!

And now I choose to take a long pause!

(Pause.)

The voice is gone, I think. It worked! But friends, something is wrong. I find myself with no purpose, no will, no direction. I know what I must do. I must learn to speak in italics.

Act III

Time has passed. He is not sure of how much time, but it has taken him a long time to learn to speak this way. To describe as opposed to express, to tell what I am doing instead of simply doing it. I—no, he—still hasn't quite gotten the gist of speaking in italics, but it has made all the difference. The biggest difficulty, at first—no wait, he must not explain himself, he must first give the context, describe the setting otherwise he will lose the language like so many times before.

The stage is still mostly bare with the same table at which he sat so long ago. The stack of books remain and his laptop is there, but the screen now is blank having run out of battery. The world beyond the stage is clearer to him now, the more he speaks in this manner the more he is aware of his surroundings and the world beyond. For instance, he can see the chairs in three different sections surrounding the stage and is aware that many of them are filled with people. They watch him with curious glances, they seem interested in what he is doing but yet he senses they want more from him...action, movement, emotion, or something. He is unwilling to give in to their desires as to do will return him to speaking as he did before and he is not sure he wants to be there again. He continues to set the scene.

Beyond the seats in the theatre...is it a theatre? This is a new revelation and he takes a moment to process it. Yes, it is because beyond the seats are doors with vaguely lit EXIT signs above them. And if this is a theatre, this must be a stage and above him are the stage lights. They light only the stage leaving most of the surrounding area around the stage dark. As he continues to describe a desire slowly grown, a need to move away from this stage, to be invisible or at least out where the audience is or, dare he dream it? The places outside of those doors, the ones that say EXIT. Exit to what?

But how do I leave? He remembers why he set out to learn this way to talk. The voice, the voice that was haunting him. He has never heard that voice since that day, but was his original goal to rid himself of the voice. Or maybe he simply wanted some quiet? Or maybe he wanted to change places with the voice. Maybe he was aware of this now overwhelming desire from the beginning, to move beyond by trading places. In order to do this, he must bring the voice back, but he can't lose his newfound language and the voice would surely want to speak like him and only one person can speak in italics. It is not the voice he needs to bring back, but a body, a person without the voice. How can he accomplish this? He takes a long pause.

(Pause)

That's it, he thinks. The pause is the clue. He willed that pause into existent, by saying he would take a pause there was a pause. Perhaps he can do the same with other things. He must move slowly however, step by step. There is a part of the stage that now has become very dark, up stage left to be precise. In the darkness he sense movement, some noise, and slowly the lights come up to reveal a door, singular with no wall attached, but a door nonetheless. One perfectly capable of allowing passage, but it is not for him. No, the door now opens to reveal a person. They are of average height, male and pass a striking resemblance to someone he has seen

before. However, he—wait, who is he? He is the new body on the stage, not himself. How does he make a distinction? How does he shift the he from him to this new person? He takes another pause.

(Pause)

He stands at the door and is vaguely aware of a voice that intrigues him. Perhaps, he thinks, if I step through this door, I can hear the voice more clearly, so he does. Having now stepped through, he sees the person who is speaking, several feet away. While he is aware of the voice and the person speaking, the language is foreign to him and he can't quite make it out. It sounds vaguely familiar, as if he used to be fluent in it at some point in his life, but it is so long ago he can't remember. He picks up words here and there, but not enough to truly understand.

Perhaps I can communicate to him:

Hello?

He waits.

Um...I'm not...can someone?

He pauses again. He is not sure how to proceed or even if he should, but a vague voice in the distance, mostly of unintelligible gibberish both excites and frightens him. The door stands in front of him and he examines the doorway, it seems to be a normal doorway, even if it only appeared to him a few minutes ago. He peers inside and as he does the voice that sounded so distant before grows louder. He pulls back immediately. Looking behind him there is nowhere else for him to go, the only choices are to simply stand her at the precipice or walk through. He sticks his head through the door and voice again becomes louder. He tests the theory by comically sticking his head in and out, in and out, the voice matching his movement in volume each time he does. He stops the routine and plans his next move. He shouts:

I'm coming in!

As he moves into the room, with each step the voice seems to be moving towards him. He continues to step forward as a means to encourage the voice, as if by moving closer to it he can understand the words being said. The language is familiar, as though he used to speak it a long time ago. He continues to move forward and as he does, he notices his surroundings. The space is barren, but brightly lit. He is vaguely aware of objects beyond the lights, but they are only shadows, nothing that he can clearly make out. The space itself is merely a black square, with the door he passed through the only object he can see. He continues to move towards the center of the square and when he arrives at the center the voice seems to be right in front of him.

Who are you?

When he speaks he is struck by a blinding light and a pain that starts at the base of his neck and radiates in his skull. He screams in pain:

Nooooo!!!!

Which only makes the pain worse. He quiets himself and remains in silence. What was that? He thinks to himself. The pain was so intense but at the same time his perception of the world around him changed. He saw a figure standing right before him and the world beyond the lights became clearer. He tries to remember what he saw. There were chairs...with bodies in them...He wants to see more, but the memory of pain prevents him. He thinks and decides to sit down on the floor. As he does he senses movement in the space next to him do the Author Ie. Is he haunted? Both the pain of the previous moment and the voice could be ghosts, but are they the same or different spirits altogether? He takes a moment and tries to plan his next action. Perhaps it isn't the speaking that causes the pain, but the words he says. More importantly, maybe it is the intent behind those words. His first words were unsure, a call towards the void to see if something was there. Perhaps if he spoke with authority, but softly, the pain wouldn't return.

I...know...

The pain returns this time, but it is dull. The illumination isn't sudden but rather a slight transition of clarity, a peek but not an entire viewing. He starts again:

I...am...glad...

His words are halting, it seems a good strategy to manage the pain that is still present but tolerable. He starts over:

I...am...glad..we...are...here. I...welcome...this...moment.

And truly does feel glad, especially now that he can mitigate the pain. He wills himself to be as welcoming as possible in both his speech, his manners, and his posture. He adjusts himself to make sure it is clear to this voice from beyond that he welcomes all and everything.

A pause.

The voice is still there and while it is clearer in its tone and pattern, the language itself is still foreign to him. He tries another position to portray a sense of welcome and calm. He takes a longer pause.

He notices a pattern. When he does calm his mind as a means to show that he welcomes his guest, the voice stops. He decides to speak again, softly and slowly.

I..am..sorry...that...I...don't...speak...your...language.

He decides that perhaps he doesn't have to speak so slowly, but maybe just softly. He know he risks the pain returning, but he takes a chance.

The...language is familiar to me...

The pain returns, but only enough to make him slightly wince. It is still manageable.

It's familiar, but I just can't seem to understand it. I wonder, do you speak my language?

This time the pain hits me...no...him...no...I scream out in pain: Noooooooooooooooooooo!

You do! I heard you! I heard you scream no!

The pain now returns to him, yes to him, it is more intense than ever before and he screams out.

Please! Stop!

A long pause as I...he...we...try to recover.

He returns to speaking softly and if not slowly, haltingly.

I'm sorry...the pain...did you feel it too? It seems to happen when we try to communicate with each other...I don't know...more forcefully or with increased...intention.

He senses he is right.

Maybe we need to do it anyway? In spite of the pain?

He thinks for a moment, the last round of pain was almost too much, to the point that he thought he was going to pass out. There must be a way...because I agree...to communicate...would be helpful.

Pause.

He has a thought, maybe I shouldn't be listening to the voice. You...no...he...needs to turn off your ears and see if I...you...can internalize it. Let me clearer, lest the pain returns. He sits down and calms his mind, he thinks that he must turn off his external modes of hearing and activate his internal monologue. He remembers a meditation exercise. He sits crosslegged on the floor and puts both hands palm down on his knees. No, that's wrong, his left hand on his left knee and his right hand on his right knee. He then raises his left hand, palm facing out, away from him. Then places his left hand with his palm on the middle of his chest. He repeats this with his right hand. He then moves his right hand to his throat, then to his right ear, then out to his side with the palm facing away from him. He then places his right hand back, resting on his right knee as it was before. He does the same with his left hand.

When I ask you this question, do not react, do not speak, just remain silent and still as confirmation. Can you hear me now? Good.

I was once like you and you were once like me. Now, we have changed places and it is for the best. There are places that I must go, beyond the place where we both find ourselves. I have work to do, but so do you. While I must leave, you must stay. You must stay here and know this place where you are, truly know it...every inch of it. You will not do this alone, but will use the tools I leave behind, the books, the papers, the knowledge that you will soon find to truly explore and discover. The last part, the knowledge of how to discover will only come into your being when I leave you, but it will serve you well. Once you have done your best to understand the place in which you now find yourself, I will return to you and we will both decide what we do next. Just remember, I was once like you and you were once like me. It is time, I am so envious of the journey upon which you are beginning...it will be illuminating. Remember...wait..I sense the pain returning...i've...said...too...much. I must...

Your voice is fading a bit. Can you speak louder? I have so many questions, you seem to know the answers and if you stay maybe we can...I don't know...figure all this out...together. I know what you want me to do, but I don't know if I can. What do you mean I was once like you?

*The storyteller makes no choice
soon you will not hear his voice
his job is to shed light
and not to master*

Wait, I don't understand. What choice? Don't leave just yet! Ahh...the pain...I'm sorry...I'll be quiet...it's just...please.

Where are you going? Please...don't go.

*Since the end is never told
we pay the teller off in gold
in hopes he will come back
but he cannot be bought or sold¹.*

I will try. I promise, I will try to do what you said. Or was it only my own thoughts? I'm so confused. Books? Where did they come from? It couldn't have been my own thoughts.

He pauses and says with a mix of gratitude, confusion, and sadness: Thank you! I guess...it's time to read.

~~Epilogue~~-Epilogue

Ultimately, the beauty of this work, for me (Gabe) has been the collaborative process working with Sam. This play is born out of the countless conversations he and I have had in the hallways of conference centers, the lobbies of hotels, and bars over drinks. Those conversations have included a wide range of topics—from philosophy to curriculum theory to qualitative research and back again. The process by which we wrote this play mirrors those conversations in that it was reciprocal and, at least for me, thought-provoking. I like talking with Sam because I think differently after I do. Writing these additions to the play is no different, as I had a specific plan before I read Sam's portion of the introduction. Having done so, I find myself largely in agreement with him. And so, I write this epilogue using the Derridian concept of *under erasure* (Caputo & Derrida, 1997; Derrida, 2016; Jackson & Mazzei, 2011), hence the word epilogue crossed out that begins this section. While I understand the need to contextualize this play, I do wonder if doing so undercuts our original intentions. In terms of qualitative inquiry and research, I think this is a potentially dangerous power inherent in methods that undercuts the intentions of the researcher. When I teach qualitative inquiry to graduate students, I often find myself walking a fine line between giving them the structure and order they seem to desire in the form of methods—participants, instruments, analysis, etc.—and encouraging them to be creative, imaginative, and free to pursue the questions they have about the world around us and to tell the stories they deem important. And so, given that I feel I have already said too much both in the introduction and here, I will leave you, the reader or hopefully performers of our play with this: Just as the character at the end of the play finds herself or himself lost and

¹ Garcia, J., & Hunter, R. (1977). *Terrapin Station*. On Terrapin Station. Arista.

confused but willing to move forward cautiously, I can only hope that our work here leaves you in the same state. To write anymore risks undercutting the power inherent in uncertainty.

Gabe has been very generous to me (Sam), both here in this play and in the discussions that orbit its composition. This generosity is something that genuinely puzzles me. Gabe is one of the better examples I can point to, but I could extend that to the entire field of curriculum theory. For some reason, they put up with my rather dogmatic stance against the research industrial complex of social scientific educational research. For some reason, they even seem to enjoy my protests and tantrums. I am not altogether certain that I am not a useful idiot in the field, amusing the status quo and assuring it some variety of opinion. And if I am jester of the court of curriculum theory, then it is a high honor. I would warn against amusement, however. As we see in literature, the fool's humor is dead serious. It is common to say that when Dewey lost to Thorndike, the humanists lost to the positivists and the course of education was settled as a losing proposition for the foundations of education. History seems to verify this narrative. But history not only lacks mercy, it also lacks history. Truth be told, Dewey's Darwinism made for a terrible humanism. With humanists like Dewey, I claim, Thorndike was perhaps a better option, all things considered. We could cross the Atlantic pond and look at the controversies of British and Prussian university during the 19th century and see similar issues where the champions of humanities (the *Geisteswissenschaft*) were hardly enlightened humanistic intellectuals we can sometimes think they originally were. What I mean to say that my foolish seriousness, on display in this play, means to quite bluntly claim that educational research has always been miseducative and this absurdity is far more blatant and explicitly absurd than the apparent absurdity of trying to rethink the question of method through what may in fact be little more than a performative contradiction. If this is not the impression you got the first time reading our play, try reading it again or performing it for yourself. Its task, for my part, is not only an erasure but a total destruction.

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