

A critical, a/r/tographical enquiry into the meaning and purpose of performing the monologue *Gallop Apace*

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Abstract

This article explores the author's experiences performing the monologue *Gallop Apace* over an extended period of time using a/r/tographical enquiry and autophenomenological questioning. Through this process understandings about the significance of using the monologue as a form of personal interrogation and the implications of using monologues as a tool for reflexive development with pre-service teachers are discussed.

Introduction

I am especially interested in the way official truths are constructed. Truth is contextual. I am always trying to get to that which is not said, ignored, obscured, deleted, or denied by the culture generally and discourse elites in particular. It is a partial truth that obscures other less flattering truths about ourselves. (Verdecchia in Grace & Wasserman, 2006, p. 335)

For any theory and set of practices is dogmatic which is not based upon critical examination of its own underlying principles. (Dewey, 1997, p. 22)

Why are some stories told and re-told, and not others? What do the stories we re-tell mean for an individual or culture? Is identity as Anzaldua (1999) suggests, a cluster of stories that we tell about ourselves and that others tell about us again and again? If such a notion of authoring the self is indeed an accurate, yet oftentimes unquestioned correlation between identity, agency, society and change, then instead of examining in depth the overarching narratives that are told and retold, what does one learn by enquiring into the stories that are never considered?

Between 2008 and 2013, I performed, directed, and researched a monologue written by Amy Clausen entitled *Gallop Apace* several times (see Background section below for a detailed rationale related to the development and purposes of the monologue). Ms Clausen, from Vancouver, Canada wrote *Gallop Apace*¹ as a part of my research on artist-teachers (Carter, 2014). Clausen has a BA in acting, an MA in Educational Studies and is pursuing a BEd degree. She has extensive experience as a director, actor, children and community theatre producer and director in Canada and the United States. However, despite continually being drawn to perform this monologue about a teacher's struggle with feeling self-doubt when teaching Shakespeare to a class of high school students, I

¹ Ethical approval was granted in order to conduct this research as well as permission from Sense Publishers to reprint the monologue.

did not examine my own key learning moments resulting from the performance of this piece. Thus, this article begins by focusing on the question: What pedagogical, artistic, and research understandings can be gleaned by a/r/tographically enquiring into the rehearsal and performance of the monologue *Gallop Apace*? A/r/tography is a research methodology that falls under the umbrella of arts based educational research and will be discussed later in this article.

For some time I have been working from a post-modern notion of identity as multiple, where subjectification places a large role on the performance of teacher (Chapman, 2002; Davies, 1996) using a/r/tographical enquiry. For this reason, I begin this article by considering how identity, a/r/tographical enquiry, and the monologue form shape my understandings of education, experiences, pedagogical reflection and self.

Once complete, I consider why the monologue is particularly well suited for use in the educational milieu in order to, as Dewey suggests (1997), examine critically the underlying principles that anchor my work. The role and purpose of exploring the importance of my own performance of *Gallop Apace* in relation to this conversation, is that it functions as a counter-normative discourse for developing pre-service teacher identity through reflexivity in relation to current conversations about consciousness and curricular reform.

Background

In 2009-2010, in consultation with my committee, I was trying to discern whether to write my PhD dissertation as a full-length play that explored a critical educational issue or to explore the potential importance, impact, and value that writing monologues might have for pre- and in-service teachers. As a part of this process, I initiated a pilot project for my PhD dissertation research that included asking several actor-turned-teachers in Canada to write a monologue about one of their experiences as a teacher. The moments that I suggested these individuals begin their monologue from were moments that were in some way troubling to them. Using Pinar and Grumet's (1976) *currere* as a starting point for rationalizing this enterprise, I built on the narrative structure of the monologue form that participants were familiar with given their background(s) as trained actors. As anticipated, the monologue form allowed participants to not only work through a critical teaching issue with which they were struggling, but to also reframe it, positively shaping an aspect of their identity as a becoming teacher. One monologue, *Gallop Apace*, resonated with me more than the others, and so when I was given the opportunity to perform it for a research in theatre education evening at a Canadian University, I welcomed the opportunity.

In preparation for this performance, I worked with a local high school theatre director and fellow PhD candidate David Beare, as well as a faculty member of my PhD committee Dr. George Belliveau, who participated as the other characters in this piece. Because I had not acted in quite some time, after this performance I felt self-conscious about what I had done and rather than spending time with university colleagues gathered for the event, I left early and critiqued my own performance. This critique felt very similar to a period of reflection that I would have had with myself about an up-coming professional

production. Because I still saw myself as an artist, when acting I had a difficult time being satisfied with my perceived less-than-professional-quality performance. This led me to turn to the methodology of a/r/tography as a way to understand my work as an artist-teacher and researcher. A/r/tography, at the time, provided me with a way to see myself in multiple ways and to understand the interconnections between the identities of artist, teacher and researcher as simultaneously complementing and complicating the way I perceived myself and my work.

A/r/tography

Arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools that are used by qualitative researchers in all discipline areas throughout all phases of social research (i.e., data collection, analysis, interpretation and representation). What makes arts-based research unique for researchers and their audiences is that researchers who employ these methods do not try and hide their relationship to the work. The specific arts-based category of a/r/tography (Beare, 2009; Bickel, 2008; Boulton-Funke, 2014; Carter, 2013 & 2014; de Cosson, 2003; Dias, 2013; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Kalin, 2014; Leavy, 2009; Leggo & Irwin, 2014; Rolling, 2013; Springgay et al., 2008) uses a/r/t as an acronym for artist-researcher-teacher. In a/r/tography these three identities exist contiguously and thus the importance of in-between space(s).

Engaging in and with a/r/tographic enquiry is not necessarily about changing the world/others. Rather it is about changing and awakening oneself in and through time relationally and situationally. In this sense, renderings rather than methods help one to tell/describe (diegesis), represent/show (mimesis) and interpret/explain (exegesis) rather than document, capture and present what has been found.

A/r/tographical narrative enquiry as a method and theory for reflectively investigating and understanding my experiences as an artist, teacher, and researcher (Carter, 2014), became a significant means for helping me to understand how I could holistically and more compassionately live with myself and contribute to the world. Prior to embracing (and being embraced by) a/r/tography, I found it difficult to prioritize art-making and creative engagements because my time seemed filled up with other tasks. Alongside my emergent engagement with a/r/tography and other arts based methods during my doctoral studies, the character in the monologue *Gallop Apace* serendipitously became a part of my journey.

Gallop Apace

By Amy Clausen

*Self-doubt is a funny thing, especially when you are staring into a crowd of pimply faces.
I feel it, feel its hot fingers creeping up my neck, while I try desperately to convey the kind
of orgasmic excitement that this speech should inspire.*

Just listen to this! I say, get a load of this rhythm!

It happens every time I teach Romeo and Juliet. There are three, maybe four scenes that just get the better of me. They take over my body. I can feel it coming, feel this surge of energy as I get ready for the passage.

Who can get up here and break up the syllables for me? Andrea? "Gallop Apace" what is that?

They look at me blankly. My eyes are on fire; I gesture back to the board, and recite it again for them:

Gallop apace, you fiery footed steeds! If this were purely iambic pentameter, I ask them, what would it sound like? Anyone?

Again I scan the room for some glimpse of recognition. The spark I am looking for, that tells me I am reaching someone, anyone who cares as much about this poetic trick as I do. I sigh.

Let's review.

What-DOES-i-AM-bic-PENT-a-MET-er-SOUND like?

Now I have lost a couple of them. They think I am an absolute nut.

O.k...it-SOUNDS like-THIS the BEAT ing OF your HEART!

If Juliet was using only iambs in this line, she would be saying ga-LLOP a -PACE. Do you think that's how she'd say it? I ask.

That would sound stupid. says Trent.

Yes! I practically shout. Yes, Trent! it would sound stupid!

Trent is surprised. He does not normally inspire such positive outbursts from his teachers, I suspect.

So how would you say it, if you were playing Juliet?

The class snickers a little, at the thought of Trent in drag. I go with it.

Go on, Trent, close your eyes. You are sitting in the upper window of your home. Romeo, whom you have recently married, in secret, will be back under the cover of night. You will probably make out. Right? You are excited. But it is still daytime! You are asking, in this speech, that Apollo run his horses across the sky a little faster today, am I right? His steeds. His fiery-footed steeds. Who can tell me what that means? Why are their feet fiery?

Ayesha jumps in, They are pulling the Sun! she blurts out.

I can see she is proud of herself too – she hated this class last week, and now she is piecing together this puzzle with the rest of us. Well, with me and Trent at least – I don't know about the rest of them yet.

And this is when the self-doubt rears its head a little. All of a sudden I can see myself in front of this group, as if I am staring in at the class through a window. What am I doing? Flailing around, jumping and whirling and dancing to get this language into them. I want so desperately for them to care. They will care, I tell myself. They must. How could anyone hear this language and not care?

So, back to Trent—

How would Juliet say this?

He responds sheepishly, as though he doesn't have the answer.

Gallop Apace.

Right Trent. Right. GALL-op a Pace.

That's how we would say it and that's how Juliet would say it too. But Why? Why does Shakespeare write it this way? Juliet is breaking out of her rhythm for this one—and we know that doesn't happen by accident. What is going on here?

A couple of students shift in their seats. Many of them are thinking about break time. About their sports game this afternoon. About the headline news this morning, or the awful things their friend said to them at lunch. But a couple of them are really considering my question, I just know it.

GALL op a PACE.

This is not the rhythm of a beating heart now is it?

I am moving my body more and more now, waving my arms and flailing a little. They may or may not care about this particular lesson, but it is obvious to me, and to them, that this might be the most exciting moment in my week. In a matter of seconds, one young student will Get It. Someone will See The Magic. They will Hear what I hear. I could pee my pants from the anticipation. But that wouldn't be very appropriate for a teacher, would it? So, who will it be?

Before I know it, I am galloping around the room. I can't help myself. I know that this makes me the lamest teacher around. Not only do I embarrass them with my frank discussions of adolescent sexuality, now I am whinnying around the room like a fool. I am beet red, I am sure of it. And I bet my underarms are wet through my shirt.

This is the day though. Look forward to this lesson all term.

*GALL-op a-PACE
GALL-op a-PACE
GALL-op a-PACE*

*I am free like the steeds. I am crossing the sky, pulling my own chariot of begrudging,
stubborn, awkward teenagers behind me.*

Commentary

When I first had to begin selecting monologues for audition purposes as an actor, the only way that I would select one to work on was if I was moved to tears or laughter upon my first reading of it. When I think back to the first reading of this monologue, I can remember both of these emotions being evoked, and so I must acknowledge the artistry and craft that Ms. Clausen exhibited through this piece of writing. Far from a simple retelling of an event in a classroom, this monologue speaks to both the inner and outer realities of what it means for some teachers. The excitement, the fear, the love of one's subject and the desire to impart to others what makes one feel SO alive are all extremely vivid moments in this piece that continually resonate with me as a teacher of teachers. In the summer of 2013, I had the opportunity to perform *Gallop Apace* once more for the International Drama in Education Association's Conference in Paris, France alongside several talented colleagues (George Belliveau, Esther Fitzpatrick, Graham Lea & Richard Sallis). Preparing this piece for performance at the time felt like a gift that I had the privilege of reopening and rediscovering once again. The beats between inner and outer voice allowed me as the actor to embody the language of this piece immediately, as evidenced in this passage:

They will care, I tell myself. They must. How could anyone hear this language and not care?

So, back to Trent—

How would Juliet say this?

He responds sheepishly, as though he doesn't have the answer.

Gallop Apace.

Right Trent. Right. GALL-op a Pace.

As an actor, I could feel the rhythm of the language embodied as the needs of the character became more immediate. Despite being asked to perform this piece at a conference for drama educators as well as speak to the a/r/tographical links between acting and my research, I (once again) only wanted to focus my time on perfecting and crafting my performance.

Reflections

The monologue is a significant form of representation and enquiry since it is a short narrative, most often with a traditional story arc that has the ability to quickly explore, reflect, critique, question, and resolve a critical issue. The monologue is a good barometer for an actor's artistic abilities and sensibilities. Not everyone can keep the attention of an audience for the duration of a monologue and when a monologue is particularly well-written, the range of an actor's abilities - physically, emotionally and mentally - can be highlighted or not. For an actor, the monologue is a test of endurance, improvisational skills, and confidence. This being said, my experience with performing *Gallop Apace* has evolved over time and taught me very different lessons along the way. Below are a series of questions that I have posed to myself to help me interrogate and comprehend the learning that took place for me as an actor, researcher, and teacher through my performances of this piece.

What was my experience working on and performing Gallop Apace?

As previously mentioned, *Gallop Apace* provided me with my first foray into acting in a research setting as a PhD student. Previous to rehearsing for the performance of this piece, I had been working as a teacher and on my Master's degree. During this extremely busy time, I was not regularly engaged in acting, but missed it. However, prior to this hiatus and upon graduation from a conservatory-style acting program, I was working full time as a radio, television, and stage actor in Canada. This highlights for me the all-encompassing experience that being an actor was and so I was extremely nervous about trying to incorporate this work into my research and teaching. Part of the reason that I believe I connected with this monologue in particular, was that the character in it was eccentric. A part of me longed to imagine, create, experiment and take on new roles and so this fun and well-written character allowed me the opportunity to bring a part of myself into the academic setting that I had previously reserved for the theatre.

On a personal note, I also felt that I wanted to stay connected with my acting friends, even though, at the time, I took another path than many of them. This theme of belonging while still feeling like an outsider also seemed to be doubled in the sense that there were not many professional artists in the academy. The few that were there seemed to be struggling with the old adage *those who can't act, teach*.

In any case, each time I rehearsed for the performance of this monologue, I noticed that my focus on other aspects of my work, research and writing in particular, became less and less important, as I began to set aside more and more time in my schedule to explore and play with this character-longing to be set free - as I scrutinized each and every movement and choice I made.

Why did I judge myself so harshly?

Although I find it difficult to discuss, there are very few moments when I actually thought that my performance of *Gallop Apace* have been adequate. Most often, I never

thought that I had rehearsed enough or was good enough when performing this monologue, despite receiving positive feedback from others after my performances. At the root of these feelings are my own body image issues. I have, as long as I can remember, been taller and bigger than the petite female who seemed to be traditionally cast as the ingénue in theatrical productions. For example, in fifth grade I knew that my school would be putting on a production of *The Wizard of Oz* in the spring of my grade four year. Because I had always wanted to play Dorothy, I learned all of her lines and songs over the summer and specially asked my parents to let me take additional dance and singing lessons to prepare. When the day for auditions came, I was ready. I actually thought I had a chance at this part and when I made it to the final two being considered I knew that since the other girl auditioning couldn't stay on pitch that I had a good chance of receiving the role I had been dreaming of. However, despite being the best singer in my class and knowing all of her lines, I became Dorothy's understudy and was given the role of the Lion. If it wasn't obvious to anyone else, it was obvious to me that having short hair and being a chubby kid meant that there something was wrong with the way I looked and that I clearly wasn't Dorothy material. Looks did matter more than ability, given that the person cast as Dorothy had long braided hair and constantly dressed the part despite having to *speak* most of her songs in time to the music during rehearsals and performances. Over time, I unconsciously began to self-select roles in which I could be seen as funny, rather than pretty. Thus, the theme of overcoming self-doubt through *Gallop Apace* resonates with me still.

In fact, after one of my performances of *Gallop Apace*, when I thought I had actually done a great job, I later viewed a video of myself. After seeing how I looked during the performance, I felt as though I didn't actually deserve to be on the stage. *The Wizard of Oz* experience was just one of many reasons for these thoughts - that also include my dance teacher telling my mother not to let me eat toast for a snack at age eight, in order to stay slim - or to seemingly only being given positive critiques in acting school after I stopped eating regularly and consequently lost weight. Nonetheless, as much as I practiced, as good as I or others have told me I have done after each performance, I continually feel that my best is never good enough for *me* because *I never look the part*.

Why this monologue?

Self-doubt is a funny thing, whether staring into a room of pimply faces, or at oneself in the mirror. But, if a part of me kept performing this monologue so that I could *feel free like the steeds* despite feeling like I was sacrificing the care-free lifestyle I perceived my artist friends had, then why did I do it?

As a new academic, there are so many things to learn. One has to learn to be in a continual process of becoming while humbly accepting feedback, all the while appearing as though one has it all figured out. Because I have felt as though I can't talk about being insecure in the academy without having to remove my own mask of capable and in control, putting on the character in *Gallop Apace* allowed me, if only for a little bit of time, to be vulnerable while in the presence of others. Additionally, since I have performed this monologue a few times, it is now easy to share it with others as a way to

illustrate my own engagement with a/r/tographic work without much effort and preparation since I have been more involved in performing in full length plays and directing in the last few years.

Why monologues?

In my current work, I have the privilege of helping to prepare student teachers to become teachers. A part of this work includes having them write their own monologue as a means to critically self-reflect on their pedagogical development or a critical societal issue. By inviting them to explore the inner dialogue their active I is engaged with their reflective Me - potentially acting as an effective way to support this difficult transition (Prendergast (in preface) Carter, 2014). Professors, like Monica Prendergast at the University of Victoria (Canada) use three-voiced monologues that explore an educational diversity issue from three distinct perspectives (teacher-student-administrator; student-teacher-colleague; teacher-administrator-listening wall of the office or classroom, etc.) in order to develop empathy in the process of creating and sharing monologues/soliloquies on multiple aspects of one's teaching practice. Stepping comfortably and fluidly into multiple roles is a skill that theatre artists bring to the teaching profession. Teaching and learning is a performance, always, and the more that pre-service teachers can enter into this performative task with confidence and creativity the better off they and their future students will be (Prendergast in Carter, 2014). In this way, using the monologue as a means to enquire into one's pedagogical practice is ultimately an exercise into understanding one's identity.

Conclusion

Performing monologues and leading my students through similar work, allows for traditional modes of reflection for pedagogical improvement and teacher identity formation in teacher education to be challenged, offering pre-service teachers and myself the rare opportunity to be epistemic subjects. This approach allows one to bracket out one's own subjectivity, through the creation and performance of a monologue, thereby allowing one to live in moments of complete becoming. Researching this subordination of one's perceived identity through the synthesis of creation contributes to understanding the potential intersections between becoming, identity, reflexivity, and art making with the monologue as a means for transmediation between parts of one's consciousness. As Maxine Greene reflects in relation to curriculum and consciousness, it is nearly impossible to continually decenter oneself free from intellectual egocentricity in order to continually reawaken oneself as a means to improve all of society (Greene, 1995). In this way, the monologue is a valuable tool for becoming teachers to engage with throughout their teacher training programs.

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Bio

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