

# **How can arts-based research in dramatic performance illuminate understanding of the therapeutic relationship?**

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## **Abstract**

This article explores how Heuristic Inquiry (HI), harnessed for arts-based research using solo performance, deepened the author's understanding of the therapeutic relationship. The research explores the rehearsal and devising process of nine performances to explore barriers to a playful encounter with the audience and client using the myth of Psyche and Cupid. Themes of seeking approval, technique and shame are considered as potential obstacles to forging a co-creative therapeutic alliance.

## **Key words**

arts-based research

Heuristic Inquiry

drama therapy

performance as research

therapeutic relationship

visibility of the researcher

**Comment la recherche sur la performance théâtrale peut-elle éclairer la compréhension de la relation thérapeutique?**

L'article explore comment l'enquête heuristique (*heuristic Inquiry – HI*), qui peut être exploitée pour la recherche basée sur les arts impliquant une performance solo, a permis aux auteurs d'approfondir leur compréhension de la relation thérapeutique. L'étude examine le processus de répétition et de conception de neuf représentations en utilisant le mythe de Psyché et Cupidon afin d'explorer les obstacles qui entravent une rencontre ludique avec le public et le client. La recherche de l'approbation, la technique et la honte sont des thèmes considérés comme des obstacles potentiels à la création d'une alliance thérapeutique co-créative. La recherche de l'approbation et la honte sont des thèmes considérés comme des obstacles potentiels à la création d'une alliance thérapeutique co-créative.

### **Mots clés**

recherche basée sur les arts

enquête heuristique

dramathérapie

performance comme recherché

relation thérapeutique

visibilité du chercheur

## **¿Cómo la investigación basada en las artes en la actuación dramática puede iluminar la comprensión de la relación terapéutica?**

El artículo explora cómo la Investigación Heurística (HI) puede aprovecharse para la investigación basada en las artes utilizando 'solo performance' y cómo esto profundizó la comprensión de la relación terapéutica por parte de los autores. La investigación explora el proceso de ensayo y diseño de nueve actuaciones para explorar las barreras para entrar en un encuentro lúdico con la audiencia y el cliente utilizando el mito de Psique y Cupido. Los temas de búsqueda de aprobación, técnica y vergüenza se consideran como obstáculos potenciales en la formación de una alianza terapéutica co-creativa.

### **Palabras clave**

Investigación basada en las artes

Investigación Heurística

Drama-terapia

Performance como investigación

Relación terapéutica

Visibilidad del investigador

### **Introduction**

The question that drives this inquiry is how the playful encounter between performer and audience might mirror the therapeutic dynamic between a drama therapist and a client. I will use my work as an artist and solo performer utilizing the research methodology known as Heuristic Inquiry (HI) to deepen my understanding and insights about the therapeutic relationship (Patton 2002). Theatre's creative nature offered an opportunity to explore the playful encounter that Winnicott (2005) regards as essential within psychotherapy practice. The study was informed by the development of nine solo performances in different venues and events in the United Kingdom and Europe over a period of three years. Each development cycle consisted of a specific performance performed a number of times in front of a live audience. For the purposes of the study I will consider the following in each performance cycle: the staging, performance aims, themes in the narrative, the rehearsal process, audience/participant feedback and reflections on the dynamic between the performer and the audience and how this contributed to my understanding of the therapeutic alliance as a drama therapist.

## **Methodology**

HI helped me explore my lived experience using the intuitive and embodied self to deepen my understanding of the therapeutic relationship. Sela-Smith (2002) considers HI as following what is 'calling out from the inside of the self to be understood'. Moustakas (1990), who pioneered approaches to HI, argues that the researcher needs to identify with the subject matter personally, suggesting that it has an autobiographical element. The central characteristic of HI is the tacit dimension that is embodied 'knowledge that we cannot describe or explain' (Djuraskovic and Arthur 2010: 1575). Arts therapists are motivated by tacit knowledge that explores the personal (Barrett 2007: 143), addressing the body and mind that traditional research can be naïve about (Bunt 1990: 6). HI is open-ended, ongoing and a constantly unfolding living inquiry that is not dependent on an end point and thus free to

pursue the unexpected (Moustakas 1990). HI is governed by surrendering to impulses, confronting uncertainty and ‘playing with one’s fears’ (Sela-Smith 2002; Bird 2016: 173) to deepen my understanding of the question. (Hiles 2001).

Moustakas (1990) considered how HI unfolds in six phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. However, HI, like arts-based research, is not a linear process. Throughout the study I will indicate and consider how the different phases of the research revealed themselves.

## **Method**

The research considers nine performances over eleven different venues from November 2014 to April 2018. Performances were held at public events, art festivals and drama therapy conferences. The first cycle consisted of three performances, the second cycle one performance and the third cycle five performances. After each performance there was an intense period of re-development based on formal and informal feedback from members of the audience and the director. In this way it resembled Action Research, a form of practitioner development that modifies different ways of being through experimentation, reflection and reviews from others (McNiff and Whitehead 2002). Feedback offered criticality and research triangulation to help objectify the researcher’s potential over-identification with the subjective experience (Patton 2002).

## **The performances**

All performances explored the myth of Psyche and Cupid and their obstacles to love, leading to their eventual union and marriage. Initially, Psyche, a mortal, becomes a sacrifice to an unknown husband, Cupid. In the early stages of their relationship Cupid remains invisible and unknown to Psyche, visiting her at night and in the dark. Cupid’s identity remains hidden until Psyche breaks her oath and using a lamp discovers he is a god. Psyche then undergoes a

series of labours imposed on her by Venus that include a descent into Hades itself, before her eventual union with Cupid.

Each cycle of performances developed the myth in different ways. The first cycle considered the narrative more fully, whilst the second and third cycles focused on a few significant themes I intuitively felt needed further exploration.

### **Cycle one**

In September 2015 two public performances at an arts festival and one at a Buddhist centre with an invited audience were offered. The set was minimal with a single microphone stand onstage. As a costume I wore Christmas tinsel wrapped around my head and small wings attached to my back. There was some use of pre-recorded music.

The aim of this performance was to use myself as a conduit for the audience's imagination (Chakya 2011). Performances in this cycle developed the characters of Psyche, Cupid and Venus and explored the theme of 'union' by addressing the audience directly. Within the performance it appeared that the rest of the cast had abandoned me as the sole performer. As a consequence I must carry the show on my own. Throughout the performance I teasingly suggest roles that the audience could play in the performance from Psyche herself to gods witnessing the final union. When the menacing Venus arrives, I address the audience by saying, 'You stay in your seats and I'll do all the talking'. The audience potentially operate as missing members of the cast, intensifying my separateness and isolation. I act as the commentator to the story where the boundaries between performance and everyday life are called into question. In the performance I allude to earlier imaginary performances when the whole cast would hold hands and sing the closing song with the audience.

A script was prepared before the rehearsal process began, adding amendments to the script throughout the rehearsal period. Rehearsals were focused on translating the ideas in the script

to the practicalities of an embodied performance. Redrafting was constant throughout the process; even some days before the final performances small changes were still being made. 80 per cent of the lines were learnt although not strictly verbatim, sustaining an element of surprise and improvisation within the performance. The rehearsal process was irregular at different times of the day and week, fitted between work commitments and the availability of a suitable rehearsal space.

The director was involved in offering script feedback before the rehearsal process began a few months before the final performances. The director's input was every two or three weeks where they would make comments on the dramatic aesthetic and offer suggestions on how it could be improved. At this stage in the performance development their involvement was more peripheral rather than central to the rehearsal process.

Involving others in HI validates the research because involving others is 'Key to understanding good qualitative research practices' (Hiles 2001: 10). The audience's role was thus important in the research. They were offered the opportunity to provide written feedback in a blank book, and consequently consent for the research was provided.

Audience/participants comments tended to pick up on the loneliness, the solitude theme and finding the performance 'thought provoking'. Questions were raised about 'whether too much solitude can be bad for us'. There were themes in the comments around the theatre aesthetic such as 'very good scene setting'; one audience/participant was impressed by my 'acting' and an ability to hold an audience. Whilst others were challenged and 'not like most theatre I have seen', there was a sense that the audience/participants had been absorbed.

I enjoyed the positive feedback, but felt unsettled by and in some ways unable to accept it. In part, I felt flat post performance and disconnected from the audience during the performance. I felt that I offered an impression of being connected with the audience, but in truth

something in my experience was missing or absent. I did not feel present. I was curious whether the audience/participants were offering congratulatory comments to meet some unconscious need in myself for acceptance.

The drive to do a solo performance and stand alone was strong. There was a living “‘passionate concern’” and fascination in the research question and performance bordering on obsession (Etherington 2004). I would regularly entertain myself with fantasies of a ‘brilliant’ performance. However, hidden within this fantasy was a longing and desire to come into relationship with the audience, for them to be co-creators. Bailey (2009) considers how a performance is not complete until the encounter with the audience. Perhaps I felt incomplete as the sole performer that there was always a part of the performance that was missing in the rehearsal process. I could see how this theatre dynamic was mirrored in the myth and Psyche and Cupid were incomplete without the other. Yet in my story when I encountered a visible and live audience there was still something amiss. It was like I had not made the adjustment from solitary play to playing with others that Slade (1995) considers central in developmental play.

Why were the demands of a solo performance so important to me? In many ways I had deprived myself of the co-creative act of creating with others by performing alone and yet there was a longing for an audience to help realize the performance. The rows of empty chairs depicting the imaginary audience in rehearsals acted as a metaphor for my longing for a real and tangible audience. I am struck by the paradoxical nature of wanting to be a sole performer, but also in relationship with others. It is important as a performer and artist that I am at the service of the art and led by illogical impulses generated through embodied play and exploration (Bird 2016).

Much like Campbell's (2003) Monomyth I had responded to the call to adventure as a solo performer and swimming in an unknown current (Moustakas 1990). Heuristic research is going beyond what I know, pushing myself beyond the 'expected and merely possible' (Douglas and Moustakas 1985: 44). Research as a form of play itself is governed by exploring and mastering the unknown that is dangerous because it is going beyond all that is familiar to me (Gammage 2017).

The longing for others and fellow co-creators in the performance suggested some unmet need being acted out that had been a theme on numerous occasions in clinical supervision. I had explored the potential tendency of using my work as a therapist to meet unmet creative and playful needs. The effectiveness of our work as arts therapists is directly related to our relationship with the art form (McNiff 1989) and without it transformative psychotherapy 'cannot occur' (Leitner and Faidley 1999: 274). I recognize in myself this search for playmates and if not channelled in the right place can get acted out in the therapy space. Yet this need for an artistic identity rather than a clinical one is important (McNiff 1998) if I am to maintain a drama therapy identity. The need to develop my artistic self as a solo performer felt crucial and perhaps a prerequisite for playing with others (Slade 1995).

## **Cycle two**

Cycle two consisted of one performance as part of the European Federation of Dramatherapy conference in Bucharest in May 2016.

The story was simplified and more stripped down and focused on an aspect of the myth: the beauty of Psyche and the adoration that she received from those around her. The set included a pile of old cassettes with the tapes strewn across the stage. Throughout the performance I wore my every day attire. The performance continued to use direct address and the theme of a missing cast. As the storyteller I created the impression of a janitor trying to replicate a

performance that he had witnessed by an absent theatre company. One of the central themes was visibility. Making myself as a performer and Psyche more visible was intensified by standing under imaginary spotlights. I wanted to play more with the audience, teasing them with imaginary props like a barrel that is both visible and invisible at the same time. Due to the absence of Psyche I am forced to play this role. I dress up in various imaginary costumes with increasing desperation to get a response from the audience that is not forthcoming.

The director was more involved in this performance, where they would witness the work in progress and offer written comments for areas that needed development. There was a sense that they were guiding and nurturing my ideas, following where I wanted to go. The new narrative was mostly written before the rehearsal process but there was increasingly more development of the script and stripping back of content. Scenes were cut, with less emphasis on developing a coherent narrative. There was a stronger sense of the performance being a process, rather than a product. In the rehearsal process I was more open to the new ideas, twists and turns that I had not previously scripted.

In this cycle those in the audience who consent to be research participants were offered a questionnaire about the impact of the performance. One audience/participant commented on the simplicity of the performance and helped to be ‘part of the story’, a theme that was picked up by another audience/participant where sufficient space was offered in the performance to develop their imagination so they could see ‘my story’. The theme of bringing the imagination to life was picked up by a further audience/participant who was able to ‘see things that weren’t on stage’. Another audience/participant felt ‘Similar to the characters on stage’ (Bird 2019). 

Feedback and comment suggested that the audience had connected with the performance and drama, but I was not confident that I had connected with them. The struggle and desire to

connect with the audience was captured when I embodied Psyche. What was significant as Psyche was that I was unable to generate the warmth and love from the audience that she was able to generate from her admirers. Within the drama my futile efforts were attempts to please the audience. As I dressed up in different costumes I repeated and obsessively asked the audience ‘can you feel the warmth now?’ Unable to re-create the warmth between myself as a performer and the audience I looked for obstacles and excuses, playfully and comically asking the audience if the ‘dead fish was too smelly?’ or was it because ‘the onions were missing?’ from the vegetable stall. The search was an attempt to understand potential obstacles blocking a deeper connection with the audience?

Winnicott (2005) considered how the need to please others created a false self that was fed from an overriding need for acceptance. I can see this theme to please in my practice as a therapist and an obstacle to being more authentic and genuine and how this might impact on the therapeutic alliance (Rogers 2003). Wanting to please does not create safe conditions for the unfolding of play because play by its nature needs to be free to explore the twists and turns without an outcome. Developing my awareness of a deep-rooted conditioning and need to please leaves me questioning how congruent I am to the principles of unconditional positive regard that I proclaim to adhere to (Rogers 2003). What seems to be emerging is a disparity between my mind and emotions. I am not where I think I am with respect to my values as therapist, aware of the underdeveloped parts of me lagging behind (Sangharakhita 2009). The embodied exploration within the performance helped activate and intensify conflicts so that I could see them more clearly. In this respect it helped towards being more congruent as a therapist, much like clinical supervision can help towards becoming more integrated personally and professionally.

Within the performance I carried on the obsessive attention to Psyche’s different costumes without limited regard of the audience. I did not appear to be waiting for their response. It

was like I had made up my mind that the costume was not right. I continued my increasing desperation to find the right costume and appearance. There was little sense of testing out whether the audience actually liked my costume as if I had already made up my mind. I also interpreted Psyche's different costumes as a metaphor for technique.

I can have a tendency for an overemphasis on technique in my practice that Spinelli (2005) argues can become a barrier to understanding the client. Barba (1995) warns that technique is other people's experiences and perhaps a defence to finding my own discoveries. Technique can be a place to hide and an obstacle to coming into relationship with the client. Technique has the potential to offer familiarity and certitude, but when I let go of this I step into uncertainty. The client represents the unknown; it is an improvisation that is characterized by uncertainty (Sajnani 2012) and change itself (Johnson 2016). Yet when I let go of technique and what I think I should be doing as a drama therapist I attune more to the client and something in the dynamic comes to life. I am aware that I am not alone in this experience. I am also aware in my practice as a drama therapy supervisor how technique can be a barrier for supervisees developing the playful encounter.

The trying on of different costumes and dynamic with the audience had the potential to mirror earlier dramas in my everyday life. Sajnani (2016: 89) explores how the relational aesthetic dynamic in theatre can make 'relationships transparent' as the co-constructed interdependent dynamics underpins the theatrical experience. Wright (2009) explores how we can unconsciously create situations to address and correct earlier attachments. As a child I was given stock answers to questions and difficulties that did not seem appropriated or relevant to my personal dilemma. In a similar manner Brook (2008) warns how overused theatrical tricks and stock ideas contribute to dead theatre. The staged drama seemed to be intensifying and externalizing an inner drama, leaving me to wonder whether I have a tendency to use stockpiled standard responses with clients and supervisees. I could see how

technique also felt safe and predictable, guarding me from the not knowing and its accompanying fears and anxieties. Technique has the potential to inhibit me from coming into a relationship with the client as it involves letting go and stepping into the uncertainty of the therapeutic dynamic. Overemphasis on technique can be a barrier to embracing space and the uncertainty that accompanies coming into relationship with the client. Technique has the potential to distance me from the intimacy and emotions that can become activated in the playful and co-creative encounter (Bird 2017) when I have let go of technique or an agenda and led by some transpersonal dimension where we do not know who is leading, seeing each other person to person, not defined or limited by our roles as client or therapist (Clarkson 2003).

The embodied nature of the performance offered an illumination, where something deeper within me began to resonate with a truth about my own attachment patterns and history. HI has the potential to challenge the structures of earlier childhood and reform myths about ourselves and relationships (Sela-Smith 2002: 57).

### **Cycle three**

Cycle three consisted of five performances in total. The first performance was in October 2016 at the WeAreKunst Gallery in Belper, Derbyshire, UK, open to members of the public. The second and third performances took place in February 2018 in Stourbridge and Derby, UK, also open to members of the public. The fourth performance in March 2018 in Leicester, UK, was part of a music therapy day event. The fifth performance in Nuringen, Germany, was part of the European Federation of Dramatherapy conference in May 2018.

The aim of these performances was to work on my physicality and being more present as a performer. I felt that there was a tendency to over-rely on text and I wondered how this may

have inhibited coming into relationship with the audience. As in previous performances, I wanted to create space for the audience's imagination so that they felt part of the story.

In the third cycle the stage was bare, except for a single chair and a string of coloured lights. The Host character, wearing a large and ill-fitting suit, juggles the demands of competing characters such as a cheerleader, an interrogator, a man tied to a chair, the sacrifice of a woman tied to a tree and a bridegroom waiting for the bride. All characters had physical and verbal motifs that they repeated obsessively throughout the performance. The Host's attempt to juggle the characters' demands is put to the test as the performance unfolds. The physical appearances of the characters collapse and merge with other characters. Boundaries and barriers began to break down onstage and also between the performer and the audience. The performance was still influenced by Psyche and Cupid but in a less direct way. The sacrifice of Psyche was still prominent in the narrative, and yet in this cycle unlike the other cycles I embodied Psyche more fully.

In this cycle the director was more involved with the decision-making process. It was their suggestion to let go of the idea of the missing cast and stage set that I went along with, suggesting a development of a more trusting relationship (Bird and Tozer 2018). The addition of live music also added a new dynamic. The rehearsal process in the third cycle was significantly different, with a more disciplined approach to the devising and rehearsal process: an hour every day, five days a week from August 2017 to April 2018, contrasted with earlier cycles that were less disciplined and fitted in between other commitments. Consequently there was more immersion and intensity in the process. In this cycle I did not script out the story before the rehearsal process, letting the narrative unfold through constant improvisation, following my instincts and curiosity. I felt that the whole self was immersed in this cycle, which may account for the activation and engagement of the "I-who-feels" and a trust in my feelings that helped me surrender to the research (Sela-Smith 2002). The post

rehearsal process was an important time, activating incubation, where the unconscious begins to percolate and make connections that were beyond conscious will (Moustakas 1990). It was during this cycle that new insights and illuminations would spontaneously arrive in relation to shame. There was a sense of interconnectedness between ideas that had appeared disconnected, transcending dualistic thinking (Beare 2009) that tends towards separation.

The theme of interconnection was further captured in the approach to collating audience comment through face-to-face informal interviews. Audience/participants offered feedback focused on the impact that the performance had on developing their imagination. The fragmented nature of the performance offered a non-linear storyline, permitting the audience to create their own stories and meanings. Stories from audience/participants involved murder, kidnap, sexual assault, character flashbacks and psychotic breakdowns. Le Compte, director of the Wooster Group, created the kind of theatre that permitted the audience to create ‘as many interpretations as possible to co-exist in the same time and same space’ (Savran 1986: 53). As I listened to participant/audience stories, I felt that they were illuminating my story, bringing new dynamics into my awareness. As participant/audience members had witnessed my story, I was witnessing and validating theirs. There was a sense of surrendering and yielding to a new emerging story, forged through the co- construction challenging notions of ownership of the co-created story (Sajnani 2016). There was a sense that the gap between myself and the audience/participants had narrowed because of the co-created stories.

Surrendering myself to the physical body and following its impulses helped to engage my feelings as illustrated with the character Frank, the bridegroom. In rehearsal I played with Frank’s marriage vows, repeating the lines ‘I do’ over and over again. Repetition offered an opportunity to relax and be less self-conscious, immersing myself more physically with the experience. As I repeated the lines something new unfolded. I was making eye contact with the imaginary members of the audience, male and female, as I repeated the vows. It was *as if*

they were the bride and I was committing to a union with the audience. Much like the story of Psyche and Cupid was about the obstacles to their union, I was exploring personal challenges to my commitment to a relationship with the audience. There was a sense of self-doubt whether I was able to forge a playful alliance with the audience and wanting to understand more fully this distrust of myself.

The potential obstacle to forging a playful alliance revealed itself in the character of Psyche, hanging half dead from the tree. The embodiment of Psyche felt like the creative synthesis and how this moment captured the essence of the research. Initially there was some reticence from myself as the 'show host' to introduce Psyche in her emaciated state to the audience. I deliver the line, 'Her body is limp and her dishevelled dress hangs from the last of its threads. Her head is heavy against her chest'. The director picked up on my reluctance to embody Psyche and thus encouraged me to inhabit Psyche more physically. As I slowly bent down into her twisted shape I took a deep breath. The breath was an in-breath that appeared to be gathering itself from the depths of my being. I was not sure if Psyche was dead, and yet the in-breath brought her to life, an in-breath that was full of energy and surprise. There was a sense that I was contacting something archetypal and activating some latent energy within me that had been out of reach through the narrowness of the intellect alone. Her position was physically painful to hold for long, further intensifying the reluctance I often felt to embody the role. The visible nature of the role intensified a sense of vulnerability, aware that the image had the potential to represent the crucified Christ. I recall as a young boy the shame I felt about my Christian conditioning, wanting to hide evidence of this belief with friends. At times I wanted to be invisible when anything about god or Christianity was raised. The visibility of the Psyche tied to the tree in front of an audience was validating.

This visibility of Psyche as an embodiment of shame minimized the power of shame as shame thrives on being hidden. I believed that this helped to alleviate some sense of shame

that seemed to accompany my relationship with 'play', both personally and professionally (Johnson 1994). This sense of shame has always operated on the periphery of my experience, but there was a sense that the performance process was activating and intensifying it.

I questioned how this sense of shame might impact on bringing the client into a playful relationship that is so crucial to a successful outcome in psychotherapy (Winnicott 2005). The activation of shame in the therapeutic relationship can thus become a barrier to forging an alliance between the drama therapist and the client. As a consequence play can be inhibited. I have noticed a tendency at times to not be forthcoming about physicalizing in my therapeutic practice and wonder whether the act of embodiment itself can trigger shame. The shame could also be a transference as 'play' can arouse strong feelings in the client with child-like associations. Shame 'separates', 'compartmentalizes', 'silences' (Johnson 1994: 176); pushes others away; and thrives on being hidden and invisible, but when it is communicated and visible it can reduce shame's impact (Sajnani 2015).

What I have noticed in my emerging practice is being more vocal and visible about my experience, which can undermine shame's hold within the therapeutic relationship. Taking the lead with expressing my feelings both verbally and nonverbally can potentially inhibit the shameful dynamics by coming more into relationship with one another. By sharing of myself in therapeutic practice there is a sense of being more true and genuine. There is then the potential for a person-to-person encounter (Clarkson 2003) that an overemphasis on a professional persona can protect me from (Bird and Tozer 2018).

Maintaining an overtly professional stance as a drama therapist can also induce a sense of shame because it has the potential to stress myself as different from the client and reinforce separation. When I have shared appropriate feelings, the potential disparity between myself

and client is minimized, increasing the interconnectedness between us. As a consequence of disclosing of myself I am more able to bring the client into a playful dynamic.

The sense of shame was often prevalent in all the performances, but particularly in the third cycle. I suspect it was because this cycle engaged more of my feelings and I was less distanced and cognitive than earlier cycles. I noticed that there was a reluctance to meet the audience post-performance. In the final performance in Germany, amongst drama therapy peers the feeling of shame was strongest. In contrast to the visibility of myself as a performer I wanted to hide and be invisible. I felt that the autobiographical element in the performance was inappropriate and did not sit with the professional conference setting. Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) argue how research that celebrates the 'I' and makes the 'self' more visible can lead to others pathologizing and thus is not without its risks. Yet art, without risks, fails to be art. It is important to risk failure. To risk being seen.

Contrasting with the uncomfortable experience at the conference, the second performance of this cycle offered another perspective. An audience/participant saw beauty in the embodiment of Psyche that helped bring more balance to my experience. They considered how the slow wilting down and embodying of Psyche captured the 'pain and the beauty'. As a consequence there was a sense of feeling more at ease with the character and less ashamed of this part of the performance. Psyche offered the potential to represent beauty, changing my relationship with the shame (Jones 2007), beauty being the antithesis of shame. A relationship that is more visible can potentially reduce the power that shame can have.

Throughout all three cycles the myth had weaved the themes of invisibility and visibility into the performance without my awareness at times. As the performance cycles developed the myth took less and less conscious prominence in the dramatic development, and yet it was gently guiding me below my conscious radar. Cupid wanted to remain invisible, but Psyche's

curiosity got the better of her. When she lit the lamp and revealed the identity of Cupid as a god he fled, leaving Psyche on her own. As a consequence of Psyche's shame there was a separation. In a similar fashion my performance has illuminated shame and the impact that it can have in bringing about a playful relationship in both theatre and the therapeutic relationship.

Intensification in the third cycle called into question how immersed I had been in the earlier cycles. Sela-Smith (2002: 66) states that if there has been no immersion 'the research will not unfold; it will lack integrity'. Activating my emotions generated more honesty that is crucial in research that focuses on self-study as it assesses the credibility and reliability of the research (Adams and Ellis 2012). I questioned whether in the previous cycles the limited engagement with feelings undermined the performance and research validity. Yet I felt that the previous cycles were about setting up the right conditions and cultivating a sense of trust in the unfolding of HI and the performance process. The earlier performances set up the foundations for the illumination and creative synthesis in the third cycle for understanding the impact of shame in my performance and therapeutic practice.

### **Recommendations for future study**

This research points to more questions, which is important (Trimingham 2002) for the development of further research as HI is constantly unfolding; there is never an endpoint (Moustakas 1990). Further research and exploration of the increasingly co-creative dynamic in the director/performer relationship might have mirrored and deepened understanding of the therapeutic relationship. More exploration of the creative tensions in the art-making process between myself and the director could have expanded on my understanding of transference and counter-transference themes with clients (Wadeson 2010; Landy et al. 2013)

### **Conclusion**

Much like the myth of Psyche and Cupid considered the obstacles to their union, I have explored the obstacles that can inhibit bringing the client into a playful relationship. In this study I have discovered how unmet needs can get played out in therapeutic work if I do not engage with my practice as an artist and a performer. I have considered how the need to please others could be a barrier to developing authenticity and genuineness with the client. The theme of hiding behind technique in the therapeutic work can also be an obstacle to coming into a playful and co-creative dynamic with the client. In the third cycle I considered how personal and professional shame can be a barrier to a therapeutic alliance, and yet honesty and transparency can help forge interconnectedness in the therapeutic dynamic. To understand more deeply the therapeutic alliance I needed to engage the personal. My practice as an artist is personal and cannot be separated from the professional any more than the dancer can be separated from the dance (Leggo 2008). The dramatic process over all three cycles was a constant work in progress, constantly evolving and moving rather than fixed (Norris 2000). In this respect it mirrored the unfolding nature of HI as a living inquiry where my understanding of the theatre dynamic and therapeutic alliance was uncovered and discovered along the way (Irwin and Springgay 2008).

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