

group

a live action role-play by Bart Price



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photography by Angel Song

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LARP, or live action-roleplay, is a form of improvisational play in which participants engage in the creation and portrayal of characters, and the construction of a shared fictitious reality. The theme of this LARP was the initial meeting of a therapy group, that specifically utilizes therapeutic role-play techniques. 14 participants were allocated archetypal roles as stimulus for their character creation, and the structure of the session was pre-established. All other decisions were made by the group. The project was filmed, photographed and audio-recorded, and in order to place focus on the agency and importance of the participants I've attempted to maintain a degree of neutrality in the formation of this text and the presentation of the LARP documentation. The following numbered notes on this project — and LARP as a whole — should in no way be seen as being any more true or false than the words spoken and thoughts expressed by the characters in this LARP, which are certainly equal if not more valid than my own. For out of fiction comes some of the most powerful experiences of a reality.

1. *group* (2023) was a LARP made for its participants, but was also documented with the intention of sharing it with the world external to the one created within it. ManyLARPs have an ephemeral quality, with minimal photos and game-play documents being the only trace of these events. This partially is due to the inherent difficulties in attempting to construct films out of such sprawling and multi-modal immersive world-building systems, but is also in many cases due to concerns over the politics of spectatorship and how the presence of intrusive film-crews could transform LARP into a form of improvisatory theatre, with a focus on performing for an audience rather than on the experience of those living within the fictitious reality. However, fundamental to this project is the belief that LARP has the power to effect not only those who participate but also to be appreciated by those outside it, as a socially-minded systems-oriented art-form and means to cognitively map out the social structures underpinning our shared and collectively constructed reality. The participants of *group* willingly consented to share their experience with the outside world, to what extent the presence of cameras effected the LARP I'll leave for you to decide.

2. Unlike more open-worldLARPs that enable participants to physically move around a space, and engage with multiple different other characters in individual and distinct ways, the nature of the therapy session meant that there was no play outside of the conversations and activities of the collective group as a whole. One of the themes

explored through this project is the inner-tensions of the self, that is both constructed in relation to the other at the same time as having the desire to individuate itself from the group. This conflict informs the nature of this LARP, that both functions on the basis of group relations, community and collective world-building, at the same time as giving participants the opportunity to create complex psychological characters that if they are to be active must exert their individual will to be heard over other participants.

3. There seems many parallels in relation to group therapy and LARP as both are forms of story-telling, with the first being an act of collective fictioning whilst the second is a means by which individuals share with other people the narratives by which they understand themselves in order to create new stories or ways of thinking, by which they can engage in positive and productive acts of self-fashioning.

4. This LARP specifically explores the use of role-play as a therapeutic technique, loosely inspired by the field of psychodrama although not a literal re-enactment of a psychodrama session. The Norwegian interaction designer and larpwright Eirik Fatland in a lecture to the Larpwriter Summer School in 2014 presented a history of LARP, in which he highlighted the importance of psychodrama and its founder Jacob Moreno as an example of collective role-play prior to the development of LARP culture, but also because of its use of introductory warm-ups and concluding debriefs as a structuring system — which is also central to most Nordic LARP practices. The decision to create a LARP that engages with this concept of therapeutic role-play becomes a means to not only explore the world of group therapy, but also to in a sense make a LARP about a LARP. For both the participants of *group* and those engaging externally with it, this brings the themes of performativity and the construction of identity and reality — which are to some extent present in allLARPs — into central focus, and in doing so the nature of LARP itself is explored. The form becomes the content and vice-versa.

5. Although LARP exists as an independent and distinct culture with its own histories and practices separate from the art-world, there is great possibility to involve LARP within the context of contemporary art due to the ways in which it successfully instantiates, amongst other theoretical texts, Nicholas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) and the earlier 'Systems Esthetics' (1968) of Jack Burnham — which retains cultural relevance due to the continued prominence of discourses around cybernetics. LARP exists as a powerful form of collective play, world-building and participatory art. The intersectional possibilities opened up by collaborations between artists, curators, theorists and LARPer's are multitudinous.

group LARP document for players

Location and schedule

The LARP will be on Saturday the 22nd of April 2023. The venue is called Kunstraum and the address is 21 Roscoe Street EC1Y 8PT. We ask that you arrive at the space at 12.30, please do not be late. The event will include a warm-up and workshopping, the LARP itself and a debrief session. The event will end at 17:00.

Background

Set in the modern day the LARP revolves around the first meeting of a new therapy group. Attendants of the group range in age, occupation and the personal struggles they face, but share a common desire to work through their problems by working together. The group is led by an innovative holistic therapist, and rather than focusing on more traditional forms of talk-therapy the group will instead utilize the power of role-play and performance as a means to explore the psychological interiority of its members. This LARP is loosely inspired by the field of psychodrama, originally created by Jacob L. Moreno, but this is not a re-enactment or simulation of a psychodrama session. Instead a broad range of different methods, some real others fictional, will be used as part of this group therapy session. The characters of this LARP are meeting for the first time, and have no prior knowledge of what will happen.

Ground rules

In this LARP each character has a sincere desire to work on their self-development, and so we ask that you follow the instructions set out by the therapist in relation to the general functioning of the session and do not, for instance, attempt to start an uprising. We also ask that you do not play into any specific mental health diagnoses such as schizophrenia, but rather focus on more general feelings of emptiness, loss and dissatisfaction.

Role-play guidance

Role-play is not acting, there is no audience and no right or wrong thing to do or say. There is no director, no script and no expectations relating to what you choose to do or not to do. The character that is created is yours to build and play with as you please. The world in which you engage is made and grown through the interactions you have with other role-play participants. LARP is at its heart about relationship building, seeing how far with others you can push the bounds of imagination. So take your time, relax into it and enjoy the experience.

character sheets

After the number of participants involved in the LARP were confirmed, character sheets were written for each member of the group. Rather than providing exact details such as the name, age, romantic status, etc. this was left up to each participant to decide, what the sheets instead provided was an archetypal role which gave a sense of a general direction for the participant to follow when building their character.

The 14 archetypal roles

the burnout

the debater

the extra

the heir

the loser

the lover

the pleaser

the rebel

the regretter

the spiritualist

the storyteller

the success

the therapist

the warrior

The participants did not have to strictly manifest these traits in their character, and if they for instance found one trait compelling but did not want to portray the others they were not required to do so. Instead these sheets acted as a form of stimulus to trigger thoughts about the kind of character each participant wanted to play, with each participant having total agency as to what direction they'd decide to take their character creation. In addition to the character traits two questions were included on the sheet, which participants were encouraged to consider prior to arriving at the LARP.

1. What is their relationship like with the people in their lives, and what impact does this have on their mood and behaviour?
2. How does their personality impact the way they act in group settings?

the burnout



1. They have worked a high stress corporate job for many years, and despite having made a lot of money and having great success in their role they have recently quit.
2. In their job they were known to be very dominant and at times aggressive.
3. They've previously struggled to understand other's point of view and to see things in any way other than their own.

the debater



1. They've recently come out of a long-term relationship that fell apart due to increasingly intense arguments.
2. They struggle to admit when they're wrong, and have a tendency to become confrontational and indignant when challenged.
3. They enjoy speaking and have a habit of dominating conversations.

the extra



1. They struggle with a feeling of helplessness and a lack of control of their life.
2. They feel a sense of regret and frustration that their life hasn't turned out the way they thought it would.
3. They find it difficult and stressful to be the centre of attention.

the heir



1. Their parents have consistently played a prominent role in their lives, influencing many of their decisions leaving them with a sense of lack of agency.
2. Their parents are very successful, creating a negative sense of expectation.
3. These feelings have previously resulted in impulsive acts of rebellion.

the loser



1. They are an introvert who lacks motivation and feels like a failure in terms of their social status, love life, education and career.
2. They feel unfairly treated by the world and believe that they're in some way special and deserve better treatment.
3. They struggle to take responsibility for their own actions and have a tendency to blame others.

the lover



1. They have a tendency to become fixated on one person, and this takes up all of their emotional energy and attention.
2. Despite their desire for intimacy they have very few friends and suffer from loneliness.
3. They feel like they're on an emotional roller-coaster, with their mood being in a constant state of flux.

the pleaser



1. They spend their time taking care of the needs of others, and struggle to focus on themselves.
2. They've recently started to feel overwhelmed and have increasing feelings of stress and anxiety.
3. They have a desire to make all situations positive and avoid conflict with others.

the rebel



1. Having spent a long time in a hedonistic cycle of partying and substance abuse they've recently decided to clean up their act and change their ways.
2. They struggle with authority figures and have a tendency to want to stand out and do their own thing.
3. They avoid being overly-serious and sincere, and often use irony as a defence mechanism.

the regretter



1. Increasingly they've felt that somewhere along the path of various decisions they've made during their life that they made a wrong turn.
2. They suffer from a self-critical feeling of mediocrity and missed opportunities.
3. They have a tendency to compare themselves to others.

the spiritualist



1. They have attended various wellness retreats and engaged in different forms of therapy.
2. They believe strongly in the existence of souls and a spiritual realm, and are striving to achieve a state of inner peace.
3. They are very suggestible and can easily get swept up in group activities.

the storyteller



1. They've experienced various personal tragedies and are willing to share with whoever's willing to listen.
2. They can struggle to view things in a positive light, and to perceive things from alternate perspectives.
3. Their focus on themselves can make it difficult to connect with others.

the success



1. Despite having on paper the 'perfect life' they've recently started to feel a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction.
2. They see themselves as a protagonist figure, and can struggle when they're not the centre of attention.
3. They are a perfectionist and a workaholic who will strive to be the best in whatever they do.

the therapist



1. They have a constant sense of self-awareness and desire to avoid being overly-dominant in group settings.
2. They are highly empathetic and have a great ability to listen to others and take a genuine interest in their problems.
3. They have a desire to innovate and do not always follow the rule-book.

the warrior



1. Having had a difficult upbringing and a distant relationship with their parents, they've learnt from a young age the importance of being independent.
2. They have a desire to be tough and strong, and this can make it difficult to share their feelings with others.
3. They can at times be stand-offish and aren't afraid of conflict.

list of participants

LARP Facilitator ... Bart Price

The Burnout ... Sabrina Jones

The Debater ... Hannah Hayden

The Extra ... Dan Powley

The Heir ... Anaïs Meiringer

The Loser ... Thibault Aedy

The Lover ... Sylvie Makower

The Pleaser ... Mara Verhoogt

The Rebel ... Bart Seng Wen Long

The Regretter ... Caitlin Hall

The Spiritualist ... Javier Amescua

The Storyteller ... Sophie Barshall

The Success ... Tatiana Bobroff

The Therapist ... George Morony

The Warrior ... Bea Xu

LARP transcript

The LARP group sits in a semi-circle with THE LARP FACILITATOR in the middle chair.

THE LARP FACILITATOR: Alright well thank so much everyone for being willing to be involved in this project. Yeah, I'm really interested to see where this goes. And yeah I guess maybe the first thing to acknowledge is the fact that unlike most normalLARPs, where there's an ability to be fully immersed and not to worry about any notion of kind of like active performance and audience outside of this LARP ... you know we can acknowledge the fact there are two cameras in the space ... there are camera lighting and there are microphones ... which I think adds an extra layer of a kind of performativity to it. And I appreciate that that might on some level make you feel a little bit on edge, but I think a bit over time we'll get used to it. And I guess what I'd say is just try to be generous with your experience in ... you know, take this wherever you want to take it, but also have a kind of openness and willingness to allow this experience to be shared not only with the group, the community that we're creating in this LARP, but also with a kind of outside world. Um but yeah ... so I thought to just start this whole process we could start just by kind of going through the general information, background of the LARP, the techniques we're going to be using, what's exactly going to be happening so that you are entirely comfortable and ready to go for it without any sense of not knowing what's going to happen ... shock or surprise. That's not what this LARP is about. I think it's about everyone feeling very safe, knowing they can take this where they want to take it and have an awareness of the kind of general trajectory of the LARP. So the background for this is that it's a contemporary LARP. It's not set in the past. It's not set in a future. It's in the contemporary world. You are all members of a new group therapy community and this is the first session of it. And rather than, let's say, a 12-step program or kind of more traditional talk-therapy groups ... although there is a lot of opportunity to talk through your issues in this LARP the focus is on therapeutic role-play. So once the LARP begins, it will be set up ... there'll be two chairs in the centre of the space. You'll be given the opportunity to sit in one of these chairs. And if you'd like to deal with the issues your struggling with in your life, in your character and role-play with someone ... let's say your character is struggling with a relationship with their mother and they want to role-play and engage in that ... the principles of the therapy that we're engaging with are replay, which is to recreate a scene from a life that's in the past ... let's say an important event or important relationship, to replay that experience so the group can kind of respond and engage to it ... redo, which is to engage with this and somehow change it ... or experiment with a

totally different way of engaging with the situation ... or rehearse a future situation, which is to imagine perhaps a future encounter with this person in which you can resolve some of the problems that you've had. I think there's going to be various situations of role-reversal where you switch from let's say being yourself to then being your mother, let's say, in that situation. And there's also, I think an opportunity to ... let's say your character thinks you know ... that we've actually been engaging with this past event, I want to change to a different event or I want to jump to now, you know, playing with time in a slightly experimental way ... you don't want to just stay stuck in that very specific iteration of the therapeutic role-play ... that's entirely open and available for you to do ... George playing Larry the therapist will take you again through that. But I just wanted to explain it through the workshop first so there's as much clarity as possible. And there's an opportunity for anyone who has any questions to raise it now, because perhaps in the LARP there's more of a sense of wanting to get through it because we only have a certain amount of time to engage in role-play ... specifically two and a half hours. Before I move on to ground rules, role-play guidance, etc. are there any questions specifically about the background that anyone wants to raise? ... Ok, great. So the ground rules that we have are that your characters are sincere about wanting to improve their mental health and deal with their problems. You are sincere about being part of this group, you are not trying to cause a revolution or an uprising against the therapist. And also you are not specifically focusing on let's say a mental health diagnoses of schizophrenia, you're focusing perhaps on feelings of anxiety, loss, but we're not trying to construct kind of caricatures of specific mental health diagnoses in this LARP. Does anyone have any questions on the ground rules? ... Ok so ... so in terms of role-play guidance ... we're not asking you to act. We're not asking you to follow a script. We're not asking you to give a performance for the camera or of what you think a dramatic situation would be. This is very much ... you have created your characters, of course with stimulus in terms of the archetypes and character sheets ... but this is very much about what you want to get out of this experience, and I want you to enable yourself to feel free in that and experience ... this kind of self fashioning and creation of a reality ... a world-building ... both through your own imagination but also engaging with the imagination of others. And I don't want you to in any way feel that I've got any expectations in relation to where this goes, or that you have any pressure to do anything that you don't want to do ... so I just want that to be kind of really clear from the get go. Does anyone have any questions on that? ... And also we will do a debrief after the LARP. So we have this workshop, we'll do the LARP for two and a half hours and afterwards we have an open forum basically to go around ... talk about how we felt if, let's say, like ... you know what I could just not deal with the fact that these cameras, and the lights, and they just change the dynamic of it for me ... we can have a very open

dialogue about that. You know, this is a process of engaging in a kind of ... the construction of a role-play community. And not only doing that but also trying to find a way to document that in a successful way so it can be shared with the outside world. Of course, there's these constant tensions between your own journey and the kind of framework that is constructed in ... let's say in film. So we can have an open discourse ... a dialogue about that. Yeah. Does anyone have any immediate questions on that or are we ready to keep going? Great. So with role-play mechanics I just wanted to say that of course, you know, two and a half hours ... there isn't a lunch break etc. so if you really feel you need ... I just need to take a second ... let's say you engage in a role-play in the centre of the space, and actually just like something really clicked ... or like it was just like a little bit too much and you just want to take a second just to breath, of course you can go outside. You can take a breather ... just for the purposes of making sure that no one kind of randomly from the outside world jumps in and starts screaming, the front door does have a lock on it. It's very easy to just unlock that and then just go outside. It's just so it's a contained environment. We don't have anyone on the front door, but obviously if you want to go outside, you can just unlock it and then relock when you come back in ... we just want to construct ... yeah, a sense of kind of safety of the community. And also we're going to have ... perhaps we can all engage in this just so everyone is entirely clear on it. If during play we want to stop play, this isn't like a kind of immersive theatre thing where ... oh my god, someone broke character the whole thing is ruined ... this is like more of a kind of playground of imagination and fantasy, and it's totally fine to break character if you feel like that's what you want to do in that situation. The way that we make it clear that you have broken character is you raise your hand. And once one person has raised their hand I ask that everyone raises their hand ... so if everyone could raise their hand ...

THE LARP FACILITATOR raises their hand and the rest of the group does so in response.

THE LARP FACILITATOR: And then whatever is being dealt with outside of the situation, like just to make sure are you ok for instance ... someone you're actually concerned about ... you resolve that and once the person who raised their hand wants to lower their hand you can lower your hand and we can keep going.

THE LARP FACILITATOR lowers their hand and so does the rest of the group.

THE LARP FACILITATOR: Okay, great ... yeah ... and now, I'd think what would be really helpful just before we go into it, because I'm trying to construct a sense of kind

of like transparency ... it's not a surprise, it's not theatre ... it's kind of a more open environment and space to explore this kind of fictitious world we're creating ... I think it'd be really helpful, actually, if we just all went around and introduced our real name and introduced our character name ... and maybe just a tiny little bit, a little brief thing... just a little bit about your character to introduce it. We're going to have an opportunity in the LARP to also introduce yourself, but I thought just doing it out of character would be also like a helpful exercise ... just so we all feel a sense of like we know who everyone is and we feel comfortable and safe in the environment. So maybe if you want to ... we could kind of go around if you want to start.

PLAYER OF THE WARRIOR: Hi everyone, my real name is Bea. My character name is Melissa and she is a 33 year old radiologist who is very bored, like chronically bored.

PLAYER OF THE REBEL: Hi everyone, my real name is Bart. My character's name is Joshua. I'm 29 years old ... doesn't like doesn't really like have a profession ... lives off some money from inheritance, trying to get over my drug abuse. Yeah ... like my substance abuse ... addiction ... yeah.

PLAYER OF THE EXTRA: My real name's Dan, the character's name is Michael. 25 year old ex-creative student struggling with a lack of direction.

PLAYER OF THE PLEASER: My real name is Mara, and my character's name is Nina and Nina is a middle-aged married woman that has been cheated on. And now is trying to deal with the pain of that ... Yeah.

PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER: Yeah. My real name is Caitlin, and my character's name is Lily and she's like an ex like art party-girl and she's experiencing, like, a lot of regret.

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: My real name is Sabrina and my character's name is Vanessa, and she's a very successful CEO of an architecture firm who is currently dealing with the fact that she feels she has no substance.

LARP FACILITATOR: My character name is Wolfgang. I'm the director of an exciting new documentary exploring group therapy ... and I have my trusty side-kick and helper Hans, who ... everyone wave to Hans. And we'll be documenting this experience.

PLAYER OF THE SPIRITUALIST: My name's Javier, my character's name is Julian. I'm

30 years old. I have a company that makes natural supplements and nootropics and I'm on a spiritual path.

PLAYER OF THE LOVER: And my real name's Sylvie. And my character's name is Joanne, but she prefers to be called Bibi by her friends. So I invite you to call me Bibi. She's a ghost-writer. She's middle aged, she's not very successful and she kind of has a very unhealthy relationship with romance ... and is kind of at a bit of a calamitous stage in her life where she doesn't have a relationship or really a job and is trying to put the pieces back together.

PLAYER OF THE HEIR: My real name is Anaïs. My character's name is Mia. She's 25 years old. Her mother is a very famous and successful writer and autobiographical writer. So she just is at a point where she has no idea who she is. And she's here as a sort of last resort measure for finding herself and general well-being.

PLAYER OF THE DEBATER: My real name is Hannah, and my character name is Jessica, and she is a thirty-year-old kind of middlingly successful wellness influencer who recently got out of a very long-term relationship. Because she was very selfish with her time and attention, and completely broke-down.

PLAYER OF THE STORYTELLER: My name is Sophie and my character's name is Aphra, she currently ... I currently work as an interior designer but previously was an author of auto-fiction ... which I've been suffering with writer's block for like three years since my closest friend died because I attribute all of my success to her. So that's why I'm here to try and get over that.

PLAYER OF THE LOSER: My real name is Thibault. My character's name is Eric. I make noise music. I live with my mother and tend not to leave the house so much. And am quite desperately unhappy.

PLAYER OF THE SUCCESS: My real name is Tats. My character's name is Rose. She's 33, she's a sculptor. She thinks she's sort of achieved everything she set out to achieve and doesn't understand why she's now not happy with that so that's why she's here.

PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST: I'm George. And my character is called Larry, and he's 47 and he is a therapist. And as a therapist, he doesn't obviously talk about his background.

LARP FACILITATOR: That's very important, that's great. So now what I want to do is just before we get into this we're going to do a guided meditation, which will be the kind of like symbolic or kind of semi-ritualistic way of designating that you are leaving yourself and entering the consciousness, or experience, of a different person. Of course, during LARP I think people fluctuate a lot between being fully in character ... not being in character ... I think it's important to say that's totally fine ... it's not expected that you're kind of like totally becoming another person. I think it's a kind of fluid experience, but I like beginning with the kind of designation of ... we're engaging in this leaving of self. And that will ... once that is over ... I will say as Wolfgang the director, you can begin Larry and then it will begin. And from that point on, Larry will be leading the session. I am in no way involved other than documenting and that's it. We'll do debrief, the way that it'll be clear and said that there is only 20 minutes left ... basically what happens is, is that wherever we're at ... you're doing a role-play in the centre of the space ... if anything is happening ... whatever point we're at I will do this [THE LARP FACILITATOR CLICKS THEIR FINGERS] which means there is 20 minutes left. Larry will say that I'm sorry that we're coming to the end of the session, we'll have to carry on where we left off ... and then we will come back to the group and we'll go around and talk about your experience of it. But Larry will go through all this information. So I'm now going to read a poem very briefly written by Jacob Moreno, who's the founder of psychodrama ... this is not a literal recreation of a psychodrama session as Moreno would have it, but it is certainly highly inspired by his teachings and ideas about creativity, spontaneity, the power of role-play as a therapeutic technique ... and so I thought it would be really appropriate ... to kind of bring some of his words into this, especially because there's this poem he wrote that is is such an amazing kind of distillation I think of what LARP is. So it goes like this ...

‘A meeting of two: eye to eye, face to face.
And when you are near I will tear your eyes out
and place them instead of mine,
and you will tear my eyes out
and will place them instead of yours,
then I will look at you with your eyes ...
and you will look at me with mine.’

Now, what I'd like to do is get two chairs and I will get them into the centre of the space ... and it'll become a lot clearer as Larry explains. As said this LARP will go on for two and a half hours, so just bear that in mind. If you'd perhaps like to get back into the centre.

THE LARP FACILITATOR places two chairs in the centre of the space and leaves the group. The PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST sits in the seat in the centre of the semi-circle.

So we're now going to do a guided meditation which will then lead into the LARP. So what I'd like you to do is all close your eyes, get into a kind of comfortable point in your seat ... just focus a bit on your breathing. Just relax as much as you can ... of course this is a new environment, a new situation. You might have certain anxieties about what's going to happen, perhaps this is your first time LARPing. I just want you for a second to focus on relaxing in this moment in the space. So just keep your eyes closed, and focus on your breathing. I want you to visualise your bedroom. I want you to imagine that you're lying in bed ... it's night-time. You're looking around the room, you're noticing perhaps maybe a specific piece of art on a wall ... a very specific detail ... maybe it's a bit of clothing that you left on the floor. And I want you to focus very specifically on that thing. Maybe you can connect a kind of memory or association to it but really, really imagine in your head that specific object, or item. And now I want you to turn your head to your left and just notice what are you seeing. Enjoy it, in it's ... in various different items not just one object but various objects. Allow your eye to glance across the various different things in that space, as you turn your head to your left. And as you do this, you start feeling more and more tired. You find your ... the weight of your body ... kind of overwhelming. You feel the sense of weight and depth ... and you find yourself being exhausted, and very ... very sleepy, and you're very tired. And you ... as you lie down ... you find yourself falling asleep. And as you fall asleep and you go deeper and deeper into the sleep ... you feel this great lightness, this feeling that you're lighter than your body, that you're you're rising suddenly out of your ... out of your body, you're looking down and you can see yourself sleeping in the bed and you keep rising. You feel this lightness. You keep rising up, up and up. Till you pass through the ceiling up, up till you're out of the building. You're out of the roof, you're looking down ... that's the roof ... as you keep on going up and up and up. As you go up, you see the different buildings and streets, people, cars around in the night, and street lamps ... you keep on going up, up, up and rising. And you feel this lightness and this freedom and this energy. And this true joy of being able to fly and rise in the sky. And you keep, keep rising. Till your part of ... you're outside of the atmosphere ... you're out into space. And you can see earth in the full distance. And you see, and

you notice, you feel this kind of feeling of warmth. And this warmth starts to kind of engulf you, and you find yourself being very attracted to it, and wanting to go closer to this warmth, this warm feeling and you notice in the distance a bright light. It's very hard to look at the light, but you find yourself feeling and finding it impossible not to look at the light, and you find yourself just being drawn completely effortlessly into the light ... till you are one with the light. Suddenly you find yourself in a bed ... not your room. You notice, that you're in a different body ... that your hands and feet, the way that you're lying ... everything is completely different. You have become this different person that you've chosen to be today. You notice what's in their room. You look to your left, then you look at a specific object ... whether it be a work of art ... a specific thing. What memories do you have connected to this thing? What is the association that you draw from it? Perhaps it draws you back to an early childhood memory, memories of a former lover ... good times with friends. You slowly get out of bed to embrace what you notice is a bright new morning. You get out of bed. You wander through your house. You go to ... let's say to the toilet, brush your teeth and shower and engage in whatever ritual you do in your day to day existence. You go downstairs. Or perhaps it's into another room, not downstairs ... or perhaps it's upstairs. You enter into a kitchen, your kitchen and make some food. What are you eating? What are you making? Notice the specific taste of that experience. Is it joyful? Is it not? Is there someone else in the kitchen that you have a difficult relationship with? Or someone you're really happy to see? You're fully dressed, you've eaten. You leave out the front door and you start heading towards a group therapy session that you signed up for. You're excited, perhaps a little bit daunted as well, perhaps you feel slightly reluctant ... you know I don't even want to go any more ... or perhaps you can't wait to get there. But notice whatever emotional reaction you have to the fact that you're going to the session ... register and notice that emotion and allow it to inform the way that you begin this experience. You walk through the door into the session and sit in a semi-circle with the chairs ... you notice the people that are around you. And when you're ready, you open your eyes. Larry you can begin.

THE THERAPIST: Hello everyone, welcome. Thank you for coming. Thank you all for being on time. I'm hoping we can get a lot out of today. I'd like to make my role in this as minimal as possible. Just the basics, you know ... so you know ... I am Larry. I'm a therapist. I'm just here to help you out with whatever it is you feel like you need some help with. So I just want to give you some basic details about today so that you don't feel confused. We are going to be using a technique which is a kind of role-play with a few different stages to it. And hopefully this is going to be a method by which maybe you can find some answers to some questions that have ... you've been struggling to

resolve lately. So I think a helpful kind of guide is we have this idea of replay, redo and rehearse. And replay would be an opportunity to show us a situation as it occurs, and then the rest of the group might be able to provide some helpful analysis ... or there's the opportunity to redo which is an opportunity for you to redo something, not the way it happened but the way that you wish it had happened that can provide you with some catharsis ... or the opportunity to rehearse ... maybe there's something which you feel you're going to have to do at some point, you don't feel quite prepared for it and this can be an opportunity for you to test an approach. And we can be fairly flexible in terms of, you know, using those guidelines in a variety throughout the role-play stages. But I think before we do that, it's just helpful to just build a little bit of ground-work and what I'm going to ask is if people could introduce themselves. And I think if ... if we could maybe speak about, if there's something that's happened lately that you've found yourself preoccupied with, and that you found you haven't really gotten to talk with the people that you're close to about and to get any kind of resolution. So something which has maybe bugged you, it's distracted you from your ... it's made it hard to hear other people's pain. Maybe just something that's kind of ... bugs you recently, and that can be something really significant or it could just be ... maybe you had an unpleasant encounter with some kind of stranger ... someone jumped in front of you in a queue ... anything really ... but yeah, if we could all just go around and introduce ourselves and give us an example of a situation like this. How would the group feel? Do you think you'd rather move around or do you think you'd like to just come forward depending on whether it springs to mind?

THE PLEASER: Let's move around.

THE THERAPIST: Let's move around?

THE WARRIOR: Or come forward.

THE THERAPIST: Or come forward? Interesting ... why don't we have a vote on whether or not to move around or to just just come in. So whose ... who would vote for going around?

Some members of the group raise their hands.

Interesting ... one ... two ... okay. So that means that we'll be just coming straight in. Who'd like to go first?

THE SPIRITUALIST: I can go first. Hi everyone, my name is Julian. I'm 30 years old ... and I think what's brought me to this group therapy is I've sort of had lately a crisis of who I am, and how I relate with people. I think, you know, there's sort of a mismatch there that I haven't really noticed and I've done lots of spiritual work in the past ... and you know even even with that, there is still something deep down that just doesn't seem to relate with other people ... I struggle with that.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Julian. No obligation but can you think of some kind of instance that's taken place recently, where you feel like that mismatch you describe between you and other people has instantiated itself?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Sure so ... there was this situation with the person that I was spending time and energy and love with ... where she basically just left out of nowhere ... and she said that I was too selfish and caught up in my own things and never even asked her what she was like. And it left me ... it sank me into a hole to be honest with you.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Julian. That's really, really helpful. So anyone want to come in next?

THE LOVER: My name is Joanna, but I prefer to be called Bibi. Everybody close to me does. I'm 46, I'm a ghost-writer ... fairly successful ,, I've also got a blog which is quite well followed. And I'm here today ... well, your prompt ... a particular experience ... I suppose recently I've been reaching out to my son, Phillipe, who lives in Florida and he has yet to get back in touch with me. And it's been about a month and it's been quite difficult. I've just been wondering why he why he's avoiding my reaching out.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Bibi.

THE EXTRA: I feel like I can kind of go off that. My name is Michael, I'm 25 years old. I work in hospitality at the moment ... not much in my life, but after a period of not seeing her since I was three years old, my mother has re-entered my life in the past month ... which has been a shock. And ... yeah...

THE PLEASER: Hm. My name is Nina, um, I've ... I'm a vet. I take care of animals. And I've married young. I married very young when I was 20, and I've spent my whole life ... I think kind of taking care of others and not taking care of myself. And recently, my husband Vlad he's ... he's cheated on me, and I just ... I do not know how to deal with

this betrayal at all. And I've come here in hopes that maybe I can ... I can confront him or I can talk to him, because I'm scared of him at the moment.

THE BURNOUT: And I'm Vanessa ... one thing that I guess has been bugging me, it's not that ... that big I guess in comparison to some of the other things we've had today ... but yeah, my ... my designer friend recently won an award and since an event that happened between us or with me a few months ago, I haven't been able to ... congratulate her. I don't want to congratulate her, which is bothering me ... that I don't feel happy for her success.

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah just going off of that ... my name's Aphra. I ... I am, well I was a novelist. I ... my genre was autofiction. And something that happened recently to me is that um ... my ... my mother asked me if I ever was going to write again ... having previously taken like no interest ever in my work ... and it made me realise that maybe I didn't have anything like interesting in my life that was worth writing about, but it also made me think about whether my sort of envy of my friend was the thing sort of driving my writing ... and she's dead now ... yeah, sorry.

THE REGRETTER: My name is Lily. I've turned 30 this week actually, and yeah ... I just feel like I'm in a bit of a hole and I can't really stop ruminating and yeah ... just hating my friends basically ... it's kind of a long story. I feel like, we'll get into it. But yeah, I'm just in a hole basically ... can't get out of it.

THE SUCCESS: I can go next. I'm Rose, I'm 33. I feel like I've achieved everything that I set out to achieve when I was younger, and I really thought that ... that would make me happy and satisfied but for some reason I'm not ... nothing specific has happened recently it's just been building over time. And yeah, I just want to know why, and what's missing. There's a few things I think it maybe could be ... but I'm not sure. I just kind of wanted your help.

THE REBEL: My name's Joshua, I'm 29 ... in between jobs ... I've got a pretty serious problem, I guess ... with cocaine and vodka. And I don't have ... I'm unemployed, actually ... better way to put it ... and yeah recently I just felt like this ... like constant cycling through ... like, every day is this really, you know ... making it very difficult for me to move ahead with my life. And the other day when I was, you know, hanging out with my friends ... it got too much. I texted my dad some really unfortunate things that ... probably shouldn't have done that. So, yes, since then I've been trying to ... well he hasn't replied to me actually. But I want to deal with my addiction problems before ...

before I have to talk to him again, I guess, you know.

THE HEIR: Um my name's Mia. Hi. I'm 25. Um ... my mother ... I'd rather not mention who she is. She's a very successful like very famous writer, and she's basically written extensively about me ... since childhood. And then a year ago she ... she passed away. And I just ... I just realised that I'd never really even thought about who I was, and I was suddenly faced with just nothingness. And ever since then I've just tried to ... just trying to collect some evidence of the ... of the truth of what I am. And it seems like things are acting against me a little bit. I was riding like this, my friend's horse, and I was trying to do this like cool new brave thing. And I actually let go of the horse and it just started sprinting towards the ... the highway ... or galloping or whatever you call it. And I just jumped off and I just read that as kind of the universe telling me ... just braveness doesn't suit you. And so I'm here to try and find out what to do.

THE WARRIOR: My name is Melissa and I don't actually know if this is necessarily the right space for me, but I was I was kind of recommended to come here actually by my GP. I've been dealing with some sleeplessness recently, and you know thought it was something to do with my diet some sort of supplement deficiency or even nutritional deficiency. But my GP is pretty convinced there might be something more going on and recommended this sort of group. I haven't been in therapy before. Feel a bit ... uncomfortable to be here, but I don't really know what to say about myself. But I ... I've worked as a radiologist for about coming up to let me think ... nine or ten years now, it's the only profession I've known ... it's okay ... I might be being made redundant soon, and I'm trying to think about that because I feel like I don't ... haven't really considered any sort of life outside of what I know. You know kind of happy, steady ... things are fine. Like, I think my partner might be a bit concerned about me. Again, I'm not ... I just don't really get what's going on. But I do just feel like things are feeling very stuck. Or perhaps I'm only starting to realise that things have always been ... I mean just feeling the way that I feel. Currently ... um, yeah I ... I mean, I think I'm just ... stop talking.

THE DEBATER: My name's Jess. Um I spend, like, a lot of time ... like by nature of my work, like, I suppose I'm like, technically like an influencer or whatever. But recently, like, my partner, who I was with for like nine years, he basically left and just said that we never spent any time together which is like, like I'm really committed to my work basically. Like it's really important for me. Um and so I think that like he kind of didn't either respect that or like, I don't know, he just has kind of different priorities. Um but like I just can't stop reliving ... these kind of moments now. It's like that kind of scene in

LaLaLand where like, you know, she goes to see her at her show or whatever or like how things could have been done differently and like, it just like wasn't even something I thought about before. But now that he's like ... not literally here, it's like it's like I'm imagining him almost ... like everything I could have said differently. And basically I just want that to stop. Yeah.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you so much, everyone.

THE SPIRITUALIST: What about that guy?

THE THERAPIST: Eric?

THE LOSER: Um ... I'll speak if I have to.

THE LOVER: There are ... there are no wrong answers.

THE LOSER: Good to know ... um ... I had lunch ... I was forced to have lunch with my dad yesterday. It was uh pretty awful. Um ... he's a piece of shit. Uh yeah we don't get on so well ... so ... yeah ...

THE THERAPIST: It's been really amazing to hear from everybody. And I think it was really good to hear that some people may be not 100% sure about this. And I think that ... I think it's really good for us to be honest with ourselves when it comes to the fact that we've tried to resolve issues so many times in the past, and we've encountered difficulties. And ... and so our expectations can sometimes be quite ... quite low because of that. And I'd ask with this group that we try to suspend our expectations, we may get nothing or we may get something really amazing from it. We just don't know, we're just going to have to see what happens. Now, listening to the group I was really thinking about how, you know, we have these ... these big conflicts, these conflicts which they've either happened or we imagine them happening and then kind of around them, we have these other small conflicts or these more inner conflicts, these conflicts with ourselves. There's so much other conflict around conflict, I mean people said some different things, but I was interested in ... in these ideas of ... significant issues and insignificant issues and issues which we have no power over ... to deal with ... and then issues which perhaps we do have the power to deal with, and then we feel like we maybe haven't used that power properly. So I just I think it's been great to hear today that, you know, conflict isn't just about this one incident taking place that's going to resolve everything. It's about a whole chain of events.

You know, it's ... it's really about us. It's about how we open ourselves. So I think it would be interesting to just as a guide for today just kind of consider, you know, the conflicts that happened before or after 'the conflict'. So I think it would be great if we could just get straight into it. So what I would like is for you to think now, earlier I was asking you to think about something lately that you felt was unresolved ... and this time I wanted to ask you to think maybe if you imagine ... you know that was that kind of event, that small thing that was bothering you that was a small A ... and now I want you think about an event that's ... that's really ... you're always coming back to it ... the kind of capital A event. And just take a moment and think about that and for the purposes of this role-play I would like you to centre this preoccupation of yours in another person, another person who perhaps you ... you've kind of felt that conflicts really manifest in relation to. And when you have thought of that, then I would like someone to come up and you can take either the seat on the right or the seat on the left. It doesn't matter, up to you ... but yeah take a moment, think it through and whoever feels ready to get going ... come up and choose your seat.

THE SPIRITUALIST: So do we not say anything until we sit in that place?

THE THERAPIST: Yeah. I think what's important is I really ... this is the group, you know, and I think it's really important that we weight all of our issues and our feelings equally in this group space. But what these two chairs are going to allow us to do is to give a particular member of the group a chance to focus on something of theirs. And so I think if you feel comfortable with this ... I think to talk about that stuff ... it can be helpful to be sitting up in that chair. But if you will feel safer to discuss whatever this issue is within the group's semi-circle, then of course you're allowed to do that as well. I mean, if anything ... which I suggest today, and you don't ... you don't feel comfortable with that, please just let me know because this is really about you. And I want to make this as, you know, as free an environment in which for you to creatively approach the issue.

THE EXTRA stands up and sits in one of the chairs in the centre of the space.

THE EXTRA: Hello yeah, I'm going to talk a bit about my dad I think, because he's kind of been the only presence and reflection of my mom ... who I have no real memory of, no real attachment to other than the things that he's kind of said about her throughout my life ... which has been pretty negative and ... yeah ... in the same way, he's not a nice person. I don't feel like I can trust the things that he's said about my mother. And I want to have her as part of my life again, now that she has decided to re-enter. But after years of sort of ... yeah ... stories and yeah ... things that my dad has told me

throughout my life. It is ... it's ... it's tough ... it's really ... to welcome her back in with open arms. I don't feel like I inherited very much from my dad, from what he's described. I'm much more like my mother. But he has been the only presence and the only reflection and access to her that I've had throughout my life. So almost ... it's the ... I'm only seeing her through ... through his eyes.

THE THERAPIST: Thanks Michael that's really, really helpful. So Michael you'll be ... you'll be the first person from the group here today to go through this role-playing technique. And I think what we're going to do first of all is, do you know who you might want to speak to sitting in this chair?

THE EXTRA: That's the thing that's what's tough like ... um, I can't decide if I want to sort of talk to my dad and have that conflict or if I want to talk to my mom and have that kind of understanding and pleasure and reconciliation, and really to get things from her perspective. You know, I'm stuck stuck between ... for sure ...

THE THERAPIST: Thanks Michael I really feel your conflict, and I really respect the fact that you are willing to sit with the irresolution of that conflict. I think that's really ... it's really just very emotionally honest. And I think this would be maybe a good moment just to see if any of the group can kind of feel something similar to what Michael's feeling. Maybe we can help to guide him towards his ... his choice.

THE SPIRITUALIST: You know, either way, I feel inclined to this. My dad sort of went out of the picture when I was like 14 year old, and sadly passed away when I was around 18. So I can ... I can sympathise with your feelings of losing this very strong, loving presence that should have been there. Now, it's not ... you know, I think you have the opportunity to really consiliate that relationship ... should I step in Larry?

THE THERAPIST: Julian I think that's ... that's been really ... it's been really great to hear that ... it's been really great to hear that. And when you say you want to step in what do you mean by that?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Well I guess, you know, stepping in to take part of the exercise is also a way for me to step in and be that parental presence which disappeared, you know, from my life.

THE THERAPIST: Julian I really think it's ... I think it's really great for people to assert themselves in the group setting. Now I think because of the fact that Michael is going

to be ... is going to be, you know, really giving us the way into this role-play scenario, I would like to give him the ultimate decision over who would play the parental roles. But I think your offer here, has ... has felt to me really supportive ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: It comes from a place of ... I understand this as a safe space. And I come to this with the best intentions and full of love.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Julian. So Michael from that did you ... did you feel any idea about I mean ... you remember earlier I was talking about this idea of we can replay a situation ... you know, you can have a chance to kind of live in it and the rest of the group can feedback. Or you can redo a situation ... you can do something which you know maybe you just wished for. I think that's something which really came in from Julian's feedback here. You know this idea of ... of creating an opportunity that we, you know really have, you know ... or again for this rehearsal idea, I mean, if you feel like there's going to be some kind of interaction with your mom or with your father in the future ... we can rehearse for that. Do you feel like any closer to an idea of which of them you'd like to ...

THE EXTRA: I think it's going to be most helpful to sort of chat with my dad and just really kind of dig for some honesty there because ... yeah he's ... not a nice person and obviously has his reasons for sort of ... yeah he's not a trusting person but in this situation I think ... yeah could find some honesty and truth about how he really feels about my mother, and how he really feels about me as well.

THE THERAPIST: So I'd now like to give you the opportunity to choose somebody to come up and play the role of your father.

THE EXTRA: Julian.

THE THERAPIST: Please come up and take a seat.

THE SPIRITUALIST stands up and sits in one of the chairs in the centre of the space.

Amazing ... amazing ... So we're going to go through a few stages here. I mean, I think actually instead of me really like explaining the kind of form of this, I think we can just go through it and then you'll actually have more of a kind of visual, intuitive sense of how it works. But if you feel confused and that's distracting, then please feel free to come in and can give you any kind of explanation that you need. So ... Michael. Do

you ... we're going to begin. I'm just going to give you an opportunity to speak to your father. And I think it would be good to kind of define the scenario, the setting of this conversation. What ... what is this conversation you are having with your dad about now?

THE EXTRA: Well, my dad does not have any contact with my mum. And he doesn't know that she's reached out recently. This is all very recent, to be honest. Part of the reason I'm here at the moment. Maybe part of the reason I'm here at the moment ... and ... and so I think I'd like to ... it would be that rehearsal telling him mom's come back ... she's back again.

THE SPIRITUALIST: Just to get a bit of background Michael ... what happened actually between you, your dad, and your mom?

THE EXTRA: So my dad was in the military he lived all around the south coast ... military bases like Portsmouth and stuff ... and moved about and my mum was an artist ... ceramics ... but never successful ... dad entirely the opposite and has been very critical of her work my whole life, and sort of art in general. So yeah, he thought it was a waste of time. It was a waste of her families time ... it was ... yeah ... obviously moving around a lot. He was not nice to her. He was cheating, he was lying and she ... yeah ... she was ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: Do we know why she never reached out before?

THE THERAPIST: Great Julian. I'd just like to ask that ... we are going to have our own opportunity during feedback for everybody to engage with this stuff. I think just so we can give Michael as much agency as possible in this scenario, I think it would be best if you could take the role of his father. And because the thing is, what this technique is really great for is, you know, there may be a problem you might want to kind of define what that problem is fine. But I think what we're really interested in here is the mechanics of that problem, how is that problem manifest in relationship. And so I think if we can begin this this ... you know, first of all, I'd like you to just speak directly to your problem. And obviously you said you wanted to kind of rehearse this conversation?

THE EXTRA: Yeah ... so I went dad ... I got a coffee with mum last week she's in London ... and, you know, she reached ... she found me on Facebook and we've met and had a coffee and I don't know how to feel about it.

SPIRITUALIST: But Michael -

THE THERAPIST: Sorry, Julian. Just to start off with, I'd just like to give Michael as much space as possible to just speak directly. So if you can just embody his father without actually speaking back to him, we'll get to that at a later stage.

THE EXTRA: I guess I want to know ... things you said about her being bad for our family ... making our family worse ... do you really believe that? Is that ... do you think she's a bad force? I find it very difficult to trust you, anyway you've not been honest with me ... later in life ... for example the real reasons mum kind of left ... what ... I trust your opinion ... weirdly ... you are my dad, but what do you actually think about this? Because I'm pretty torn at the moment. I ... I really want to see her again. And want ... that ... that presence in my life. But I just know it's not ... it's not going to be the same as it ever could be ... it ... it's torn apart at a very early stage of my life. Yeah, I ... I don't know, is it worth it? ... Anyway.

THE THERAPIST: Thanks Michael. I'd just like to hone in ... and I feel that that was a really strong expression of how you're feeling, and your frustration with your father. And I think this would be a great moment if you two could just switch chairs.

THE EXTRA and THE SPIRITUALIST switch chairs.

Now Michael, I'd like you to imagine that Julian is yourself. And I would like you to be your father and speak to him. You could, in light of what you've just said, give a kind of response. And once again, this is a chance for Michael to just speak. And then in the next stages we can get Julian involved in the ... kind of dialogue.

THE EXTRA: I think you have to contend with the fact that she wasn't looking after you when you were young. She wasn't there for you ... she wasn't there to support our family ... keep the family close together ... I didn't do the best job of that either, I told you. You know recently ... what actually happened between me and your mother ... and ... yeah, I think ... yeah, you're going to want to see her and I can't stop that. I don't think she's a positive force in our life ... in our lives ...

THE THERAPIST: Thank you. It's been really, really helpful. Now if you would like to swap seats.

THE EXTRA AND THE SPIRITUALIST SWITCH CHAIRS.

Julian would you feel comfortable taking on the role of Micheal's father?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Yes I believe so.

THE THERAPIST: Michael do you feel good about that?

THE EXTRA: Absolutely.

THE THERAPIST: And now ... just before we start, we're going to try out a dialogue now where you're speaking with one another ... do you still want to continue this in the form of a kind of rehearsal of this conversation about ... around like your mom, or do you want to come at it from a different angle?

THE EXTRA: Probably ... probably keep rehearsing...

THE THERAPIST: Keep rehearsing? ... Yes ...

THE EXTRA: Yeah ... going to be most helpful.

THE THERAPIST: Great. And I just want to check with the rest of the group ... you know, this is this is obviously very weighty ... emotional material here ... and I want to make sure that everyone's feeling okay.

THE BURNOUT: Feeling okay but I'm just wondering at what point we get to feedback?

THE THERAPIST: Okay ... well, I mean, if you feel like you want to feedback then I think that's absolutely fine.

THE BURNOUT: Yeah I mean, I come from an ... I've got a lot of brothers. Male presence has been a big influence in my life. And I think just listening to you, responding as your father to your self ... really bothered me actually. It really bothered me that you don't have the perspective of what your father's done so far for you in your life. How old are you again?

THE EXTRA: I'm 25.

THE BURNOUT: You're 25. Yeah. It just doesn't seem like you've appreciated him just

as a ... as a human with his own separate life rather than just your father ... that he made mistakes but he's been there.

THE EXTRA: Yeah I ...

THE BURNOUT: Sorry Vanessa ... yeah thank you ... I think it's ... I think it's really helpful to, you know, consider this separation between us and others. But I think it's all really important in our feedback, that we preserve the distinction between ourselves and the other members of the group. Because you know, what we might project on to them that could be from us. And so in our feedback, I think it's really important to ... it was really great to come forward with ... about your background and your relationships and your family. But to stick with that and not necessarily to, you know, come with the idea that you have the solutions for Michael because Michael's a complex guy, you know ... because we can't know enough about him in the short time that he's had a chance to speak ... to provide him with solutions. But yeah, it was great to have your input.

THE EXTRA: It's also not feedback I disagree with.

THE THERAPIST: Amazing. So if we continue with the dialogue now ...

THE EXTRA: Absolutely.

THE THERAPIST: Does that feel good?

THE EXTRA: Yes.

THE THERAPIST: Yeah? ... Great.

THE EXTRA: So I guess ... I would like to know what you think truly about seeing her ... you don't have to be involved at all. I don't want particularly want you ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: Listen Michael ... like ... after all we've been through together. Just us. You know, your mother ... she hasn't been around. And that's been really tough for me. I've been mother and father all at once whilst I've kept my rank in the military. You know, with everything that we've done, we've done together. She left. She decided to leave. And now why is she coming back now ... have you thought about that? Have you thought about the way that makes me feel?

THE EXTRA: I think I do ... I do ... I do ... but I also think about a lot of the things we've done together and they're things that you wanted to do. And they were not fun ... when have I ever shown a genuine interest in rugby ... when I have ever shown a genuine interest in getting involved with the military?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Michael. I've always thought those were things you loved to do ...

THE EXTRA: Clearly not, I shut myself in my room for hours ... you know ... to escape having to do that with you. I don't know. I do feel ungrateful. I do feel ungrateful because you're clearly trying to provide something, you're trying to give me the best of yourself. But I just ... it's not ... it's not me. I get that you ...

THE THERAPIST: Thank you so much. That's really great. I think I want to pause it here. And I think this would be a really good moment to hear back from the group on what we maybe perceived from this conversation. Has anyone else had the same feeling?

THE HEIR: What feeling sorry?

THE THERAPIST: Well, I feel like actually we're maybe starting to see certain dynamics of this relationship coming through from the conversation. What I think would be really interesting to just get feedback on that quickly.

THE DEBATER: Like, how much did you articulate like verbally to your father that you didn't enjoy that kind of stuff?

THE EXTRA: It was never an even reaction ... you know it'd be pretty extreme. And I don't think he was used to that and knew kind of how to deal with it ... it would be almost on the point of patronising ... you know ...

THE DEBATER: So, like, he just couldn't hear it basically.

THE EXTRA: Yeah, I mean ... it's um, yeah, it was a type of communication that was just, you know, not working for the audience. Yeah ... I'm processing it ... how I didn't formulate any better way of talking to him ... you know ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: Maybe you just wanted his love and a connection with him ...

THE EXTRA: Right. Yeah that ... that ... connection. But that just seemed to be an

impossibility you know.

THE PLEASER: Well, I just want to say that I ... I have two daughters, and I know that what I gave them as a mother their father could have not given them. And I know that what a mother can give is something that is irreplaceable. And I feel so sorry for you that you had to grow up without a mother. And I do not think that you don't deserve to reconnect with your mother and have that understanding from your father.

HE LOVER: I too. I feel so much empathy for you. I think it sounds as though you've been deprived of an open heart with whom to commune growing up. And, you know, it really ... it really strikes me how brave you're been seeking that out now at such a young age. I don't think that needs to be equated with ingratitude. I was quite, quite shocked by your response [*referring to THE BURNOUT*]. Obviously, we all come from different from different experiences, but I think it's not a sign of ingratitude to be seeking something that you have been missing.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you so much Bibi, that's really helpful. And I think it's also really interesting to create that distinction between you know ... what shouldn't but necessarily is ... you know, perhaps you feel Michael shouldn't feel ingratitude but at the same time that is how he feels, and that often is the way of our relationships that we cannot help but feel a certain way. We maybe know that we shouldn't ... but I also feel very conscious Vanessa that, you know, you had some very strong feelings earlier. I was interested in what you took away from this conversation.

THE BURNOUT: One thing I'll just say as a prelude is I do definitely struggle with empathy ... I suppose I'm quite ... I don't know ... even the length that this has taken to make this role-play happen has been too long for me ... too fumbling, too mumbling ... it's just I'm a solutions based human ... a productivity based human. And I guess ... I guess I just see you as quite young, and unable to recognise the support that you've already had which so many lack ... even one parent who's trying.

THE THERAPIST: Vanessa, do you feel like when you were younger ... how did ... how did you deal with some of these painful feelings yourself?

THE BURNOUT: I don't remember much pain in my childhood. I remember respect. I remember the value of respect ... respecting your elders, respecting what you're given.

THE THERAPIST: Interesting. So I feel like there's a common thread between this idea

of ingratitude and this idea of respect ... you know ingratitude in a more round about way. That feeling of ingratitude is ... it comes from a feeling of respect, you know what I mean ... respecting someone and so you maybe feel ... you feel bad when you're not showing the gratitude that you should show. So I think there's maybe more in common here than we can necessarily see and ... this whole mumbling, fumbling idea that you ... that ... that's been bothering you. I think it's very important here that we understand that, you know, the mumbling and fumbling is really the core of these relationships. I mean, that's ... that's perhaps ... I wasn't direct enough when I was talking about this idea of the conflict which pre-empts bigger conflicts, but those are very much of the mumbling, fumbling sort that don't fully resolve themselves. And so I think it might be helpful today if we really lean in to that. And, you know, this is not a clean thing. You know, these emotions they're ... they're tricky. So Michael, we can now proceed with the next stage where I think if you two swap chairs ...

THE EXTRA and THE SPIRITUALIST switch chairs.

And I think just because that ... that felt quite significant if we move on with the same conversation, and now I'd like you to be your father ... and Julian I would like you to be Michael.

THE EXTRA: I think ... yeah ... without your mum around ... yeah ... it ... yeah ... it was easy for me to kind of really want to ... to make you in my own image ... you know, there wasn't another parent ... there wasn't another set of variables to take from. So I just ... yeah ... I wanted to you know, give it all to you and I don't know ... that's just not that ... that ... reaction, that ... that emotional reaction to things that, you know, lot's of people would say that you should be grateful for. You know, I don't have any experience of dealing with that I don't understand how to deal with that. But ... yeah, I ... yeah ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: Dad it's okay. But, you know, now I have an opportunity to connect with my mom. And I understand that you have your own personal issues with her, but you need to separate that and you cannot prohibit me from reconnecting with her. And ... you know, otherwise this will lead to a resentment towards you. And I want to have both of you in my life if possible.

THE EXTRA: Yeah. I'm ... I'm not going to prohibit you. But I am going to say she's useless ... she's you know, she's not someone you should be ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: But that is your experience and perception of her. You know that comes from whatever happened in your relationship, and you shouldn't imprint or put that on to me ... you know, you should liberate me.

THE THERAPIST: Thanks for that, I feel like it's a really strong moment to end this part of the role-play. Um, yeah ... does anyone have any feedback before we move on to the next stage?

THE SUCCESS: Not so much feedback. But I have a question. And with this rehearsing obviously the conversation is not necessarily going to go like this if it happens in the future. I mean dad ... I get the sense he wouldn't be that calm in reality and that could have some negative effects on Michael ... right? ... I mean what ... what's your thinking behind that? ... What ...

THE EXTRA: Um yeah... I've got no expectations at this point ... sort of agree.

THE THERAPIST: You know I think this idea of calm is interesting because what on the surface can ... one can have a calm appearance ... one can sometimes use a calm appearance to make statements which perhaps at their core are not very calm ... that are perhaps quite intense. I'm thinking about certain statements that struck me which Michael made when he was playing his father ... how does everyone else feel about this, this idea of how the rehearsal is perhaps not a strictly accurate representation of how it could be. And that's an interpretation, it may in fact be that you're playing it exactly as it would be.

THE HEIR: I think that might actually be better in some way ... because if you focus on the internal state of the parent ... like Michael's trying to be his dad here, and it's easier to access or create empathy with his dad without forgiving anything if he's staying calm and trying to actually come up with reasoning behind his dad's behaviour. I think that might be positive as well. Whereas resorting to rage could just kind of be a projection to the emotional state without considering the internal kind of scape of the depth.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you I think that's really, really helpful insight there ... um, so shall we proceed now... I would like you Michael to sit back down ... to breathe ...

THE EXTRA leaves the centre and rejoins sitting with the rest of the group.

Julian would you mind to sit back where Michael was?

THE SPIRITUALIST switches to the other chair in the centre of the space.

And now ... Michael I would like you to pick someone else to come up and play your father.

THE EXTRA: Um ... would you like to?

THE BURNOUT: Play your father?

THE EXTRA: Yeah.

THE BURNOUT: Yeah I could play your father.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Vanessa. Are you comfortable with that?

THE BURNOUT: Yeah, sure. I could play your father.

THE BURNOUT stands up and sits in the centre of the space facing THE SPIRITUALIST.

THE THERAPIST: Yeah ... great ... and this ... I'd like this to be an opportunity for Michael to observe something. And I think Michael how would you feel about proceeding here ... should we continue with the kind of rehearsal form that we had before?

THE EXTRA: Yeah it's difficult to pick out a single event to kind of redo or re-interpret at the moment. Just ... from ... yeah ...

THE THERAPIST: Of course it is ... yeah ... yeah... that's why I think with this it's really ... we try and keep a kind of looseness to this role-playing process.

THE EXTRA: I think ... yeah ... keep rehearsing.

THE THERAPIST: Great, great. Okay. Um, so now Julian you'll be playing Michael's father ... Vanessa, you'll be playing Michael.

THE BURNOUT: Dad ... I met up with ... with mum. She got in touch with me and I

want to restart the relationship ... I think ... and I wanted to see how you felt about that.

THE SPIRITUALIST: Well you know how I feel after everything. Don't you ... aren't you ... do you not feel ungrateful for doing this to me?

THE BURNOUT: I do ... I do ... And I guess that's why I'm looking for ... I don't know ... maybe forgiveness or ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: From who ... from me or from your mother for leaving?

THE BURNOUT: I ... I would like to ... I don't know ... I don't want you to be uncomfortable with it. I guess I wouldn't like to ruin our relationship. But I also think that maybe you haven't been honest about her. I just don't want to lose another relationship in my life.

THE SPIRITUALIST: Well, you know Michael, it's ... at the end of the day, obviously, my relationship to your mother ... it's not been good. I ... I think she's wasted her life away by playing the artist ... and took no interest in being ... in being a part of your life. I won't prohibit it but ... it won't make me happy ... but I don't want to lose you Michael, you know ... I think you're right. You're an adult now, and you should be able to make your own decisions. And, you know, if that's what you want ... but, you know ...

THE THERAPIST: Great if we could just pause here. Vanessa I ... I thought it would be really interesting ... really interesting to pop you in the chair as Michael for a second. Just because I felt that there was a really strong identification between the two of you in that feedback you were giving ... and now I'd like you guys to swap back over and you will be playing Michael's father, and Julian you will be playing Michael. And if we just continue from there.

THE SPIRITUALIST and THE BURNOUT switch chairs.

THE SPIRITUALIST: From where we just left off?

THE THERAPIST: Yeah ... you don't have to continue from where you just left off. You can ... Michael what would you like?

THE EXTRA: So the way I kind of found out the real reason for mum leaving ... that the ... you know the cheating ... was through my parents and maybe some sort of ...

confrontation ... uh was through my uncle sorry ... so maybe some sort of confrontation about, you know, the lying ... dishonesty from dad ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: Well, dad ... um ... I think I know, actually, that you haven't been completely honest with me about what happened between you and mum.

THE BURNOUT: What happened Michael?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Well, you know, my uncle told me the whole truth.

THE BURNOUT: What's the truth? The truth is that your mother left.

THE SPIRITUALIST: The truth is that you were cheating on her. You know ... you were being a piece of shit.

THE BURNOUT: Do you think that's a justifiable reason to leave your baby son behind?

THE SPIRITUALIST: It's not the only reason.

THE BURNOUT: Some indiscrepancies in sex. Do you really think that that's enough reason to relieve your fucking son?

THE SPIRITUALIST: But dad ... you've got to recognise that you also took part in...

THE BURNOUT: She just left you!

THE SPIRITUALIST: She left and then you took me away ... she left. And then you prohibited her from seeing her son.

THE BURNOUT: Is that what she's told you?

THE SPIRITUALIST: No that didn't come from her.

THE BURNOUT: So ... so ... what has she said? Why's she getting back in touch? You're 25 years old!

THE SPIRITUALIST: She just simply wants to be a part of my life. Well, like you took ... you have a huge part to play in my relationship with my mother.

THE BURNOUT: I don't know what you want from me Michael. I really don't know what you want from me.

THE SPIRITUALIST: I just want to have a dad and a mum. That's all I want. I just want to be loved by both of you. And I just want you as well to be honest for once in your life ... be honest, not just to me but to yourself.

THE BURNOUT: But I want you to understand what I've already done, the sacrifices I've made. I raised you alone. I raised you completely alone with no-one. I've had to be mother and father and do the best I can. I've come from a repressed background myself.

THE SPIRITUALIST: Because of your own faults. You cheated on mum. You were the one ...

THE BURNOUT: That's no excuse. One ... one or two nights of mistakes is no excuse to leave behind your child. And I need you to understand that. I need you to understand that what she did was unforgivable.

THE SPIRITUALIST: You traumatised her.

THE BURNOUT: You put your mother on a pedestal ... you really, really do ...

THE THERAPIST: Okay. If we just ... if we just pause here Michael, how do you feel about this stage?

THE EXTRA: It's helpful I think it's not wrong, that she's ... definitely exists on a pedestal to me. Also, the really interesting thing ... I guess I haven't even considered it ... I was just so you know excited about her being back. But why now? Like what ... what ... what? Why? Why's she decided to ... does she need something from me? There's not been any other contact before now. You know, it's ... it's confusing ... it's confusing ... yeah ... yeah ...

THE THERAPIST: Great. If you guys would like to come and sit back down.

THE SPIRITUALIST and THE BURNOUT leave the centre and rejoin sitting with the rest of the group.

How's everyone feeling?

THE REGRETTER: Quite sleepy... I don't know why ...

THE DEBATER: Me too ... I'm just like really jet-lagged ... I just had like a nine hour flight ... but like that was like really intense basically ...

THE LOVER: I feel like a lot has been stirred up ... I feel quite vulnerable.

THE SPIRITUALIST: I'm feeling this weird blockage ... coming from her energy [*referring to THE BURNOUT*] ...

THE STORYTELLER: Can I just say that that's not necessarily a bad thing ... given that perhaps when this actually plays out in real life, there may be a real blockage coming from ...

THE SPIRITUALIST: No this is ... I feel like, you know, like her aura ...

THE THERAPIST: I think it's helpful to talk about how we're feeling, and what we know about how we're feeling and ... and not to try and get inside the heads of other members of the group ... because after all, we don't know each other personally. What we have is these slight impressions that we have of one another. You've really been with Vanessa when she was in another role, so I think it's it's more helpful to speak more generally about how you're feeling.

THE DEBATER: I mean I felt shame when I watched that interaction just because ... like I think I can be that father person ... like pushing basically. And I could see that you were like struggling basically to get through in a way. And I like couldn't relate to you at all in that situation, but I could relate to the constantly like ... just pushing, pushing and like it completely felt normal like in my life. It's felt normal. But then like watching from the outside. I just felt embarrassed that I could be that person basically.

THE THERAPIST: Eric I was thinking of what you said earlier, when I was asking us to go around and give a little background about something that's happened recently ... I was wondering whether you had any feelings about what we just saw?

THE LOSER: Mixed feelings it's difficult ... I'd rather not say ...

THE THERAPIST: Of course.

THE LOSER: Sorry.

THE THERAPIST: Don't ... no need to apologise Eric. No need to apologise. It's good for you to say how you ... how you feel and what you need. That's really what we want from this group.

THE BURNOUT: I have to say, now that I ... after embodying your father there is a feeling of guilt for maybe how harsh I was previously ... um yeah that I ... I was maybe too quick with my remarks. Because seeing you struggling to respond, or letting my rage just get the better of me there ... um ... it was painful to see the weak ... such weakness really. I find this space of vulnerability ... vulnerability and weakness is something I struggle with ... so ...

THE EXTRA: It did feel like you were there with him ... it felt like you inhabited the same space as him ... but you know, it was ... yeah, it was strange to see.

THE THERAPIST: Thanks ... it's really great to see this collaboration coming through ... remember that this is a chance to ... you know to help yourself ... and it's also a chance to help these other members of the group. And you never know, you might do that completely by accident ... it's just about experimenting. So thank you so much for that. That has been really ... really thank you. So now I think we can move on to the next role-play. Um, is anyone keen to get up and explore something? Something difficult ...

THE STORYTELLER: I think ... I ... I would actually quite like to go because I think that I ... is it ... is it Mia? I think perhaps me and Mia would be quite a nice pairing because we've experienced ... I mean I'm a writer and her problems are her mother ... revolve around her mother writing about her for her whole life. This is something I really need to explore. Is ... my ... my real question that I have to ask my friends is can I write about her ... and so I think maybe it would be good if we explored that together, if you ... if you felt like it.

THE THERAPIST: Afra thanks. Mia how do you feel about that? Is that something your comfortable with? I can see the ... you know, that's ... that's very close ... that's very close. And if that's something which you feel you would feel too tangled up in ... then please don't feel uncomfortable to say so. Afra I'm sure would understand. I think she

has ... she's being very optimistic in this assertion her idea.

THE HEIR: I'm happy to. I feel a bit nervous, but I'm happy to try.

THE THERAPIST: Yeah? Yeah. Great, great. Well Afra, do you want to come up and ...

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah.

THE STORYTELLER stands up and sits in one of the chairs in the centre of the space.

THE THERAPIST: Amazing. Mia do you want to come up and take a seat as well?

THE HEIR stands up and sits in one of the chairs in the centre of the space.

Great. So ... why don't we try and think of some kind of scenario for this conversation.

THE STORYTELLER: Um ... maybe ... should I explain to Mia a little bit about the history of things before?

THE THERAPIST: Yes, I think because of the fact that, you know, this ... this feels like a really interesting moment, where perhaps some kind of compromise is necessary ... because here really this is about both of you, actually. It's going to be ... I think it would be impossible to focus on either of you as a specific individual, without that being to the detriment of the other element ... member of the group. So ... Afra, why don't you give me a sense of what you're going to want to look into today, and then Mia why don't you offer some reflections back ... and we can make this somehow collaborative and symmetrical.

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah ... yeah so I think that ... so I met my best friend Lily at school when we were 11, and she was my only friend ... she was my best friend. She encouraged me in everything ... I ... like I was a lazy, weird student. And I was still weird but I was her friend, and she was amazing at everything. And I would just compete with her for everything. And she'd always win, but I didn't care because like ... just to be with her second best ... it was like ... it was the most amazing thing in the world. And she dropped out of school when we were 16 because her dad, like had huge ... he had huge financial problems. And so I continued, and in the end I ended up writing ... which was always her dream ... and she was never able to do that. And then there was just this distance between us. And I guess it always felt that I owe everything

that I am to her influence, and if she hadn't had to leave school she would be the one writing and not me. And like ultimately everything I've ever done would like ... pale in comparison to what she could have achieved if she'd just been a bit luckier ... and I write about my life ... I write auto-fiction, but I've never written about the most important relationship in my life which was my relationship with Lily. And I think like the biggest question that I have ... and I think the reason I haven't been able to write ... is because the only thing that I could write about now is her and me together. And I need her permission, but I can't ask it because she's not here. So ... yeah ...

THE THERAPIST: That's ... that's really clear thank you Afra ... Mia did you find yourself able to separate out your own experience from Afra's?

THE HEIR: Yes ... yeah.

THE THERAPIST: Did you see any kind of common threads that you'd like to explore quickly?

THE HEIR: I mean, the common threads are ... are huge ... but the fact that you're seeking permission makes it a whole different world. And it makes me feel more comfortable than I would have otherwise to engage with this.

THE THERAPIST: Yeah ... yeah ... sometimes scenarios really blend together, these ideas of replay and rehearse ... and I feel like there's simultaneously these concrete realities that you want to deal with now, and then there's also these ... there's a lot of wish involved here. And I remember earlier on you were talking about a dream that you'd had, and I think on some level this ... this ... this feels like there's a certain amount of dream involved in this situation and perhaps we could skew that. So shall we begin? Do you want to ... do you want to start? Mia would you be comfortable playing the friend?

THE HEIR: Yeah ... is it Lily?

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah it's Lily ... so maybe ...

THE THERAPIST: Just to remind you, this is an opportunity for Afra to speak uninterrupted. And then we get into the dialogue at a later point.

THE STORYTELLER: I think it might be best for me to speak to Lily as though she was

still alive, rather than a Lily who exists in some other realm now. Do you think that?

THE THERAPIST: I think, you know, if that's good for you ... if that's good for you ... yeah ... great.

THE STORYTELLER: Okay. So I've ... I've always wanted to be able to be the kind of friend that you have been to me, and be so honest and share everything of myself. But I've always been terrified that you will see how small I am compared to you. Because in my gut and in my heart I'm so certain that if I hadn't been your friend I would be ... I don't know ... like ... nothing. I feel like you ... your spirit has imbued every part of me, to the point that I ... and I don't like ... I don't blame you for this. I know it sounds bad, but I almost like ... no part of me feels like it belongs to me. And that's ... it's been really hard for me because I don't trust myself and my own abilities. And now that you're going to be gone soon ... I wanted to ask you permission to ... to write about you and us, and maybe to be honest about, like, the way I see myself for the first time ... instead, instead of kind of pretending that I'm better than you or ... yeah, that's it I think.

THE THERAPIST: Thanks Afra. So I think there was a lot of stuff that for the rest of the group ... that was relatable. Would you feel comfortable Mia, swapping chairs?

THE STORYTELLER and THE HEIR switch chairs.

Now Afra I'd like you to speak to Mia as if she were yourself and as if you were Lily. And you can give an answer to what you've just said, or you can imagine that you're speaking first of all ... it's up to you.

THE STORYTELLER: I think this one's really hard for me because my biggest problem is never ... I've never been able to step outside of myself in this way. But I'm going to try and just fill in what another person in this friendship might say ... that ... Afra ... your success is your own and ... the things that you have achieved are your own. And the bits of me that make up who you are, that's also ... there are so many parts of you that make up me as well, and that doesn't make me less. It makes me more to have you as my friend. And I was really sad about the distance between us when you became successful, because I always thought if you resented me or ... I don't know thought that I wasn't like a worthy friend anymore ... but maybe I understand now that it was your own feelings of shame around the pieces of me that were inside of you.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you so much Afra. That was really great. Now, if you just swap

chairs again ...

THE STORYTELLER and THE HEIR switch chairs.

Does anyone have any observations that they want to share with the group? This can be observations about Afra's place in this, about Mia's place in this.

THE BURNOUT: One thing I'm curious about is ... I guess a few times is ... I guess a few times in that interaction on both sides, you mentioned it's all orbiting around you and you're struggling to get outside of yourself. And I'm just curious because all of the ... all of the responses that you gave to Lily also kind of complimented you ... like her friendship not being worthy enough for you. Or ... I don't know. I'd be interested ... I don't have a very good image of Lily besides, like, I guess some quite meek ... and pandering towards your friendship rather than how ... if she was angry, if she were like ... how do you think she actually felt towards you? I didn't get much of that, that's all I have to say.

THE STORYTELLER: Sure. Yeah, that's interesting. I mean I ... I guess in my attempt to understand things I've given you, like, a complete wrong impression of, like, I definitely was the meek and pandering one ... at least inside my own head ... even ... and even when I have had, like, material success I've always felt second. But maybe that's just me centering myself again. I don't know. I think it probably comes from just as a child feeling always a bit second best. Um ... I moved to England when I was 11 and I had like a different accent ... everyone made me feel weird. And then I met Lily and she accepted me and it's just been like ... I don't know, um, I'm sure she felt a lot of anger towards me. I'm sure she felt betrayed by me ...

THE THERAPIST: Mia how would you have felt?

THE HEIR: If I was ...

THE THERAPIST: If you were Lily.

THE HEIR: I mean ... there might have been some resentment there, but if your ... was your bond closer towards the end?

THE STORYTELLER: Towards the end ... no not like it used to be. I think Lily had moved away to London and she'd met this guy and yeah ... it's things ... that's ... that's

probably my biggest regret.

THE HEIR: Do you feel like she would be ... she ... she would feel like you owe her your success or is that something you project onto her?

THE STORYTELLER: I think she always knew that if she ... that she was capable of ... anything. But I don't know how long a person can sustain that within yourself without materialising it into actual things. So I think I always believed that she would be sure of herself and her ... and the fact that she would always be better than me no matter what I did. And yet I see now from this conversation that that's actually just not probably true, and that if someone's life for almost eight years doesn't match up to the life that they probably wanted for themselves ... that they would experience a true sadness and a true lack of ... feeling of lack, or perhaps even jealousy of their friend. And maybe even they would envy the fact that their friend who they gave so much to, and encouraged to study and taught about everything, that that person then went on to be more successful than them. So I think I yeah, I probably let her down. I think I did. I should have ... I should have understood that a person ... a person has to nurture their talents in order to feel like sure of them. It's not enough just to know that you could have done things ... yeah.

THE THERAPIST: Mia how are you finding separating out your own experience from the character of Lily?

THE HEIR: I don't know. There seems to be a remarkable amount of consideration about Lily. That, to be honest, I am having trouble seeing you here in this selfish ... negative light. You know I think the lack ... Lily's lack of success seems to be more circumstantial. And in my experience with my mother I think there was a complete lack of consideration, and a willingness to take and just make it her own. And I think that if you ... if you feel you're able to speak about Lily without you making her yours, and really letting her exist as a complex, you know, person ... that you don't know all of and that exists outside you, I think that she would give you the permission to write.

THE STORYTELLER: Thank you. So can I ask a question back, do you think that the hardest thing about your mother writing about you was then the way that your life felt contained within her words?

THE HEIR: The hardest thing about it was that there was a feeling of immense mismatch that was hard to clearly identify because the words, the stories she ... she

was recounting weren't false. But I seemed to just not have any place with it. And my whole life, I just kind of didn't even question what my place was because there was already one. And then I ... and then I just was suddenly 21 and I was like ... I have no idea what my own needs are ... I didn't even know I had needs. And, you know, it was just this thing where I was ... I was perceived so strongly by her but also I guess the public by extension, that I had no idea how to not be perceived, or how to reinvent, or what even that thing was that was experiencing all those things ... I just completely lacked any sort of narrative about myself. And that was ... yeah ... I mean confusing is the main thing. But it feels horrible when ... when people appropriate you. And so I think the question you're asking yourself is ... it's not a light one, and it's a legitimate one. And I think it is something to consider carefully whether you should write about her, or at least consider the way in which you do so.

THE THERAPIST: I think ... I think this has really added some interesting dimensions to the two role-plays that we just went through. And I think now we're going to ... we're going to start the dialogue stages. And typically the format would be now for you to swap chairs once more, and for you to take the role of Lily and Afra to speak as herself ... however, I think in light of the conversation we just had, it would be interesting if you guys decide which you'd like to be.

THE STORYTELLER: I think maybe it would be best if you were Lily, because I think I seem to be quite bad ... despite my efforts, at stepping outside of myself. And I think that Lily's situation is similar to your situation with your mother.

THE HEIR: I agree ... yeah.

THE THERAPIST: Great ... yeah ... that sounds right. So should we ... should we go ahead with the role-play? Are we happy? Should we redefine this scenario at all?

THE STORYTELLER: So the options are to replay ...

THE THERAPIST: These are guidelines, they're not so much options. Yeah ... I mean, we can use this as an opportunity to be really creative and imagine what could have happened, or perhaps you want to try and recreate some kind of historical moment ... or perhaps you want to try and have a conversation with ... with Lily. Perhaps at some point in the future.

THE STORYTELLER: This might seem unrelated to the things we've talked about ...

but there was a time in our childhood when I was in love with a boy for a really long time, and he fell in love with Lily and I didn't tell her how I felt ... and I just watched on and actually helped bring them together romantically and it crushed me. And I think that ... that is such a such an important moment for me, in establishing this internal narrative of always being second.

THE THERAPIST: Great so should we work with this moment?

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah ... maybe ... maybe we could recreate that moment and I could tell ... instead of just pretending Lily could tell me that she and Nicholas have ... that Nicholas tried to kiss her. And I can tell her how I feel.

THE THERAPIST: Go ahead.

THE HEIR: So we were just walking along a park yesterday, and Nicolas like ... was acting really weird. And then when I turned around he just like kissed me, and it was so beautiful ... but also weird because I didn't even know I liked him or ... you know ...

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah. And do you think you like him?

THE HEIR: I don't know ... I guess I ... you know it's nice to be liked. I like him. Yeah, he's ... he's cute.

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah, that makes me ... because, you know, I haven't said it ... I always thought that you probably knew I've like had a crush on him since we were five.

THE HEIR: What?

THE STORYTELLER: You didn't know?

THE HEIR: Why have you never told me that?

THE STORYTELLER: I don't know, I think I just ...

THE HEIR: I'm so embarrassed now, I went into the detail and everything.

THE STORYTELLER: No ... don't feel ... it's ... thank you for telling me.

THE HEIR: No, I'm sorry. I would have never let that happen ... if I knew ...

THE STORYTELLER: No it's my fault. I never ... I'm never honest with you about anything.

THE HEIR: Why?

THE STORYTELLER: I don't know. I think I just feel scared of ... of ... rejection or ... I just ... I didn't want to seem foolish and, like I probably wouldn't have even told you that I liked him.

THE HEIR: Why not?

THE STORYTELLER: Because he probably wouldn't like me anyway. So it doesn't make ... it doesn't matter.

THE HEIR: Why do you think he wouldn't like you?

THE STORYTELLER: Because you're prettier ... smarter ... more interesting ... everyone is in love with you.

THE HEIR: That's not true.

THE STORYTELLER: That's ... I mean, I've got, like, these glasses and ...

THE HEIR: Your glasses are so cute.

THE STORYTELLER: No.

THE HEIR: Yeah they are ... you look beautiful and everyone thinks that ... there's no competition between us. We're a team.

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah ... no it's true. It's true. Thank you.

THE HEIR: We're like twins.

THE STORYTELLER: We are like twins.

THE THERAPIST: Wow.

THE STORYTELLER: I felt like an eight year old.

THE THERAPIST: I think it's really beautiful when this process allows us to really go back in time, and I think that's was just happened.

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah, it's hard to act out like your young child self without ... without speaking like a child and then feeling really embarrassed about it.

THE THERAPIST: You feel embarassed?

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah sure ... definitely ... it's hard ... going back to childhood memories. It's easier to think about your adult self, but in front of a big group it's definitely like ... I found it weird to act like a child, even if it didn't seem like it.

THE THERAPIST: How did the rest of the group feel about it now? Are you feeling sleepy still?

THE REGRETTER: No actually no ... yeah, I really connected with this for some reason. I think it's ... it's lit a little lightbulb in my head about stuff that I've been dealing with as well ... yeah ...

THE DEBATER: It was a very fulfilling and quite beautiful resolution to watch that. Yeah, it felt hopeful.

THE SPIRITUALIST: It's always important to connect with your inner child, you know, besides your truer self ... more honest, more loving, more playful. And it was really beautiful to see how Afra connected with that inner child and just ... allowed her to express herself.

THE THERAPIST. Thanks Julien. Anyone else?

THE PLEASER: It was quite hard to watch for me in many ways. And in some ways I feel quite envious of you that you were able to have this friendship, because I remember I had a very good friend before I left the country with my husband ... and I left my friend to be here. And in many ways I think I felt very guilty for leaving her. But I just I feel very loyal to my husband, and I felt I had a duty towards him and to be with him.

And he moved here to work and I also found work here. And in that sense I've missed that. I haven't had that friend ever since, and I've been just really alone in my family. And I think you should be grateful that you have that friendship with Lily, because I think it is something that's special to have. And yeah ... it almost brought me to tears really. I think I haven't thought about that friendship for such a long time and it's really lonely to not have friends.

THE THERAPIST: Thanks Nina that's ... that's a really powerful moment of vulnerability.

THE LOVER: I can ... I can relate to what you said because I struggle with finding people to connect with and it was ... it hurt to watch two people who had such a long-standing relationship.

THE THERAPIST: Did anyone have any more complicated ideas about what we just saw? Did everybody find it a hopeful, beautiful encounter? Did anyone struggle to connect with it?

THE REGRETTER: Well, I was going to say it was hopeful on one hand, but I felt this kind of conflict ... because I was sort of fighting the sweetness of it. Because it's something I really don't want to do with my friends. Maybe I'm not ready. But yeah, it was lovely to watch. But I felt this kind of fight as well.

THE BURNOUT: Yeah, I also agree with that. As I said at beginning there's a friend I have, who I haven't wanted to congratulate on something ... but we're adults now. We met through our career paths, and this place of sweetness of softness there's no ... we don't have that to return to. So I guess I also felt a disconnect or a jealousy of this because I don't know how to ... how to be honest as an adult. I think I can be honest as a child, but not necessarily an adult.

THE REGRETTER: What I would say to that is that sadly Lily isn't actually here anymore, and I'm not going to have this conversation ... and that you absolutely, if you can, you should take away from this group that I'd have done anything in the world for this to have happened in real life with my friend. So if there's any way that you can make it happen, and maybe that's the only reason that we've come to such a sweet resolution today.

THE HEIR: But it highlights to me that sometimes there can be two people, and they ... if things are brought to the surface, things can be resolved. And if two people stay in

this ... I have ... I don't know Lily but I have this strong intuition that she just had no idea ... never had any idea that you felt like this. And often people who are in the limelight in that way don't have any idea that their friends feel this kind of secondary thing. And if they knew they would be sharing. And, you know, and I just feel like it's the importance of ... of ... of addressing those things and that that can have real value.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Mia.

THE PLEASER: Do you not resent Lily for leaving you ... for abandoning you ... or not being here anymore?

THE STORYTELLER: Uh, I mean ... I don't know. Um ...

THE THERAPIST: Is that how you feel about Lily?

THE PLEASER: In a sense, I feel like we have a duty towards people in our lives, and we should stick with them. We should really stick with them no matter what. And we should not leave. I don't think ... in a way of course I don't know what she was going through. But I think that is cowardly.

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah ... I mean, I guess I've always suspected that her death wasn't an accident ... but that's something that I have just considered very privately.

THE THERAPIST: I think this is a space where we want to just really focus on the emotional stuff and are ... you know more concrete confusions about events while I don't doubt the importance of them, I think in this space they can ... they won't necessarily allows us to just continue down an emotional path. I'd like to just move on to the final stage now. Afra I'd like you to take a seat and I would like you to choose somebody for that.

THE STORYTELLER leaves the centre and rejoins sitting with the rest of the group.

Mia would you be comfortable playing Afra for this final stage?

THE HEIR: Um ... what is the final stage?

THE THERAPIST: For the final stage someone else is going to come up, and they are going to take Lily's role. And that's going to give Afra a chance to actually be the

observer. But I just think ... I noticed you ... you had a kind of strong connection with your character, and I felt like you needed to adapt slightly around that. But I feel like maybe right now ... would you feel comfortable playing Afra?

THE HEIR: Yeah, unless it would help someone else to ... to do so ... I'm happy to.

THE THERAPIST: No ... no ... I think for the sake of continuity ... Afra do you want to choose somebody to come up and play Lily?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Uh ... does anyone feel that they related strongly to Lily?

THE THERAPIST: Well, you know, I ... I think that's that's one way of approaching it. But then there's also a chance here for people that maybe felt like they didn't relate with Lily at all to come up and have a go at that relation ...

THE STORYTELLER: I guess part of me is ... is scared of the result that if someone plays Lily in a way that I find upsetting, I think that's what I'm scared of. But...

THE LOVER: You have to remember that you don't own her though ... like a character to be written about. She might react in a way that you didn't feel comfortable with and that's okay.

THE STORYTELLER: Would you like to play Lily?

THE LOVER: I ... I could play Lilly ... uh ... yeah ... I suppose ...

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Bibi ... great. And Afra thanks for letting us know about your trepidations. Does the group feel comfortable in being there for Afra if she starts to feel scared? Afra do you feel comfortable letting us ... letting us know if anything upsets you?

THE STORYTELLER: Yeah. I think I'm okay with ... I'm okay with being upset. I think my fear is to watch a situation which I find to be totally inaccurate, and something that couldn't have happened. But I think I just have to trust in everyone. Yeah, yeah ... I'm ready for it.

THE THERAPIST: Okay. Are we ready to proceed with this last stage? We just had a very hopeful child-like conversation. Do we want to explore another iteration of that?

Or would you like to return to the original kind of greeting Lily in the afterlife? Or we can try something new out ...

THE STORYTELLER: I think maybe not in the afterlife. I think maybe around the age of 24 ... both of us meeting ... maybe a meeting that never happened ... which is me going down to London to visit Lily, which I should have done but I didn't do. And just reconnecting. Just like very ... maybe just quite simply ... just sharing things about myself instead of guarding myself.

THE THERAPIST: Great ... great.

THE HEIR: Seems difficult for me to do ... maybe ...

THE THERAPIST: Not knowing enough about Afra?

THE HEIR: Yeah, if I'm just ... if it's for the purpose of reconnecting without, you know ... I don't know how to.

THE THERAPIST: Well, I think these role-play exercises, they are the ... the words of the emotions ... really, I think, content-wise. I don't know how you feel about this, but if you could just give impressions of ... of yourself, of Afra. I mean, you just had a really powerful moment of connection between the two of you as kids, and just go back to that memory and use that as your source for Afra.

THE HEIR: Should we begin? Hi.

THE LOVER: Hi.

THE HEIR: How are you?

THE LOVER: I'm okay ... um ... it's quite a surprise to be able to connect with you, but a welcome surprise. And I'm very glad that you reached out ... something that maybe I didn't have the courage to do ... so ... it's very ... it's good ... to be with you. And I'm excited to hear about what you've been up to.

THE HEIR: I've been writing alot. Just trying to make life make sense you know ... I bought a dog, started learning about flowers. Just started to do things to feel normal and ... but ... yeah I don't know ... never feels normal when you're not around. So I just

wanted to see how you're doing and maybe integrate you more into my life.

THE LOVER: That's very kind of you. I'm doing well. I'm doing fine. Um ... having said that ... you know I've definitely been missing you. I haven't managed to find someone that I share the same kind of intimacy with. And I suppose I have been struggling thinking of you living, you know, your life um ... so distant from mine. I think I've been feeling a sense of exclusion. Or perhaps as though you've kind of moved on, which you know, like I said, it's ... it means a lot that you've thought to reach out because it helps with those feelings that've just been compounding. I definitely feel a lot of disappointment about where we left things. I feel disappointment about a lot of things, but that is the thing that hurts most.

THE HEIR: I'm sorry.

THE LOVER: You don't need to apologise.

THE HEIR: But, you know, you're not just a person in my life that I can move on from. You're like a cosmic force ... you're like my ... my grounding ... you're like my rock. You're a lot more. And even if I did move on, there would be something missing in the way I see you as indispensable.

THE THERAPIST: Wow, I think that was just ...

THE STORYTELLER: You know, I couldn't I couldn't have asked for it to have been done better. Thank you ... both of you ...

THE THERAPIST: That was amazing. Thank you so much Mia for being so giving and offering your own experience to help Afra through that therapeutic role-play. That was amazing. If you guys would like to sit back down.

THE HEIR and THE LOVER leave the centre and rejoin sitting with the rest of the group. THE LARP FACILITATOR clicks his fingers to indicate to the group that the LARP will soon end.

Now I think you will have some feedback from the group. This can be feedback about what we've just seen, or this could be more more general feedback about how the group has gone for you. I hope that those of you today who haven't had a chance to go through the therapeutic group will come back to a subsequent session in the future

and we can do that. But yeah, how does everybody feel?

THE SUCCESS: I'd say I definitely think that although I didn't get a chance to role-play I resonated with a few bits from all of them ... and I think that I've realized maybe that I have been driving how I'm feeling right now. There's definitely some relationships that I maybe neglected to consider might be causing me some problems, that now I think I need to ... maybe not repair quite yet but at least think about how they're affecting me. I haven't spoken to my sister in ten years and I suppose I probably should at least think about ... yeah how that's been affecting my life.

THE THERAPIST: Thank you Rose. Anybody else?

THE STORYTELLER: As someone whose participated, I definitely feel like a sense of awkwardness around maybe having been able to share more about myself and maybe not allowing space for other people to. I also realise that not everyone was going to be able to go through that same process as me. And so I think that's just something I need to be like okay with and find a way to ... yeah ...

THE LOVER: I will say in that vein I ... I ... you know, I didn't really go into any of the stuff that I've been struggling personally, but I found it helpful to empathise with others as a kind of a foundation ... from which to ...

THE BURNOUT: I ... I definitely experienced ... I feel some sort of trajectory throughout this from being very quick with you Michael ... and then I think seeing myself demonised maybe by the two of you, some of your comments made towards me due to my response ... which I've never really put my behaviour with the way people react to me together but playing out and seeing ... seeing that improvisation really helped me piece together why some people view me the way they do, which yeah I didn't expect to get from this.

THE THERAPIST: Do you feel comfortable in separating yourself from those ways in which you find yourself to be viewed by other members of the group?

THE BURNOUT: Um ... I don't think it's something I've cared about before. But knowing that maybe my harshness is in the minority in this kind of space made me feel smaller than I usually do. It just made me reconsider the way I am slightly ... I think ... yeah. Or maybe listen to some of the truth of those statements ... I don't know.

THE THERAPIST: Yeah ... I mean, I think this is ... this is really ... it's similar to some of the difficulties that have come up in the actual role-plays, like what do I take from the other person or do I siphon off ... and I think the fact that you feel like maybe you've been more willing to hear other people ... I think that ... I think that sounds great. And I'd like to thank you and all of the other people who have gotten involved and helped out with the other people's role-plays. That's been ... that's been really great ... that's been really great.

THE WARRIOR: I just wanted to share that I ... I actually feel more alienated now than I did at the start of this experience. I found it almost impossible to engage with anything I saw in the space today. I actually fell asleep a number of times. Obviously I'm going through some sleeplessness at the moment so let's just attribute it to that. But I ... couldn't really connect to this depth of feeling that people supposedly experienced. And I just ... I just don't get it. Like, I still don't really even get the purpose of this ... like playing out meaningful encounters that haven't happened or maybe did happen once ... but how can this resolve something that has already gone in a certain way in the past? Your friend is dead. Like, you know, like you're not her friend. I just don't understand it. But I don't know. Maybe ... maybe this is definitely not for me in that case.

THE REBEL: Actually, on the contrary I think so ... what I see in not just the role-playing, but some of the interactions between different people ... just kind of seeing it happen. It's triggering a lot of things that I never considered too deeply, or memories or incidents that have happened before that ... maybe I have buried it ... or I just didn't want to think about it. You know, I just didn't want to consider it, but seeing it play with like real people. You know, there's some kind of sincerity that I kind of lost touch with for a long time. Yeah. It took me a lot to reflect about ... so yeah, very ...

THE THERAPIST: Thanks Joshua. Yeah I mean sincerity ... you know ... can be really great to be in a space of sincerity but that can also feel, you know, quite alienating. You know, a lot of people would probably rather keep things a bit lighter. Yeah. I mean, I think it would be interesting to hear a bit more critical feedback about today. What's ... what's left you feeling a bit on the outside? What's left you feeling dissatisfied?

THE REGRETTER: Well, I just doubt that any conversation I'd have with my friends would be so pleasant. Because that was pleasant and you guys really got into it and it was really interesting. But I don't think it's going to be like that for me. If I confront say like my ex-boyfriend whose like a sex addict, it's like he's ... he's ... he doesn't care the

same way that these two people care about each other. I don't see this working for me.

THE THERAPIST: Interesting.

THE REGRETTER: But I'd like to ... this makes me want to. But yeah, I just don't think it's that easy.

THE THERAPIST: So I can see that you've ... you've ... you've taken from these conversations an idea that they were pleasant. And I think it'd be interesting to investigate the actual participants in those conversations. Did you also find them pleasant, or was there anything about them that you perhaps found unpleasant? Or members of the group to watch?

THE EXTRA: Yeah ... um ... doing the first role-play was uncomfortable. You're visualising, you know, a presence in your life through the eyes of someone else, and that's really disconcerting. But I think probably the biggest part was just like actual sincerity. Even when it was confrontational it was helpful. There's a limit to tenderness and I do think it doesn't work for everyone, right? Yeah ... yeah ... uncomfortable but then also kind of confrontations that were helpful ... you know.

THE SPIRITUALIST: Yeah I think for me also taking part in the role-play, I think you know I was really aware that I was kind of performing but I think that made me realise that often times I ... that's how I go through life, that I'm just like performing myself without ever actually being sincere with myself and actually trying to understand myself.

THE THERAPIST: What about how you felt about the other ... the other people within the role-play that you engaged with ... how did it feel? How did the other person feel to you?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Well when Vanessa came in ... that confrontation ... you know I ... I think even though I was ... I was playing Michael ... it also allowed me to ... to see you know, just ... yeah ... just like what ... where his father could be coming from.

THE THERAPIST: Mhm. And did you see in addition to the father ... did you feel like you got to see something of Vanessa as well?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Yeah. And I think that I'm sorry if I offended you that's ... where my

comment about you know feeling like a weird blockage ... that's where it came from ... because I think I felt that ... that was not just, you know, you played Michael's dad ... but it was also like part of you just playing up yourself.

THE THERAPIST: Have you ever felt that blockage when it's just been you alone?

THE SPIRITUALIST: Yeah, actually, you know I think that's why I like this constant search for something. Like ayahuasca ceremonious ... retreats ... everything and still there's that blockage ...

THE THERAPIST: Do you think maybe that blockage has actually made it harder for you to try and see Vanessa clearly as a complex person?

THE SPIRITUALIST: I suppose so ... I suppose I'm too caught up in my self to see that Vanessa is her own person. And like a complex human being with her own fragilities ... just like I am.

THE THERAPIST: How do you feel about the blockage?

THE BURNOUT: I mean ... it's interesting ... because I think for a few months ago ... that have gone right over me ... but I actually did go into an ayuasca ceremony myself recently ... and that's kind of led me here today because I ... I had this experience where everyone around me had very emotional ... emotional ... vulnerable responses. And I just saw myself as an empty vase.

THE SPIRITUALIST: That's how I felt as well in the ayuasca ceremony ...

THE BURNOUT: Mm ... yeah ... so I think your comments they ... they did ... things are stinging more because I'm considering myself for the first time ... or how how I am to the outside which ... which hasn't happened previously. So yeah it's ... I'm considering myself for the first time, or how how I am to the outside which hasn't happened previously. So yeah, it stung to see myself outside of myself briefly ... I guess ...

THE LOVER: I feel maybe i should say I'm ... I'm sorry for expressing ... um ... a degree of discomfort with your response. I think it came from a place of my own vulnerability in regrad to criticism. And ... I hope ... I hope I didn't make you feel self-conscious or ... the kind of ways in which I would feel if I felt criticised.

THE BURNOUT: No it's ... it's fine ... we can move on from this because yeah ... we can move on from this if possible ...

THE THERAPIST: We can ... we can move on. But can we really move on ... because I think a lot of what we've seen today is that to a certain extent we can move on ... but we leave pieces of ourselves behind in these difficult encounters. And I think what we've seen today is that there are actually ... they can be a source of power and energy and positive introspection ... you know, these painful experiences that we've had.

THE LOVER: Pieces, we leave pieces of ourselves ... or we give pieces of ourselves perhaps ...

THE THERAPIST: Yeah.

THE STORYTELLER: Especially so with strangers, which makes it ... it changes things ... like revealing yourself so much to a room of people you don't know.

THE SPIRITUALIST: That's interconnected with the universe you know.

THE STORYTELLER: Well, maybe it is ... but I do think that like I feel in equal parts alienated and comforted by the whole experience of that dynamic.

THE THERAPIST: I think it's really powerful that you can feel both of those feelings at the same time, and that speaks to me of an emotional honesty. Are there also very mixed feelings from this?

THE EXTRA: Similarly ... it does ... it feels like coming in and acting ... as ... yeah ... symbols ... you do start when you're staring that ... that person in the face whose playing an immense figure in your life ... you slip into something completely different ... um ... and it is, it is alienating ... that's a good way to put it ... um but also yeah ... yeah ... immensely comforting to have it shared at the same time. To yeah have people approach you with sincerity and honesty ... and be able to share in the discussion.

LARP FACILITATOR: If everyone would please like to close their eyes ... and start breathing ... breathe in and out ... slowly ... focus on your breath ... I want you to imagine that your character ... we fast forwarded a little bit ... it's come to night time ... the session ended. You went back home and now you're going to sleep after a long

day. Perhaps the session had a very strong impact on you. Perhaps you left with a feeling of emptiness and frustration at perhaps yourself or perhaps others. You notice, as you're lying in bed, a specific object ... perhaps it's an image of a friend, a loved one ... or a work of art or whatever the object is ... just really focus on that thing. For some reason it catches your attention. Perhaps it brings you back to a memory. You find yourself falling asleep. Feeling heavy. You fall asleep ... and as you fall asleep, you feel this weightlessness engulf you. And you rise up out of your body. You see your body below and you look at yourself, you feel detached from your self. And you rise up and up and up out of the roof ... you see the streets below. You rise up ... you rise up ... up into the sky out of the atmosphere. You see the planet below you, and you feel a warmth ... a magnetic attraction to a bright light in the distance ... and you find yourself being drawn outside of your control towards it. You enter it ... and you find yourself here with your eyes closed in the group as your original self. You take a moment to breath and when you're ready you can open your eyes.

THE LARP FACILITATOR removes the two chairs in the centre of the space and rejoins the group. They replace THE PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST in the centre of the semi-circle, who instead moves to sit in another seat.

Alright guys let's just ... I imagine everyone wants to perhaps take a break ... or pause ... but I think before we do that we're just going to do a final conversation ... where we go around the circle ... we talk about our experiences. Some people obviously take a more active role than others, but I don't think that means in any way that their experience is somehow less legitimate or perhaps less intense. I think everyone could have had their own personal reaction to what occurred, whether positive or negative. So I think it'd be really interesting to hear a bit more about each person's like experience of it ... also more generally your ... your feelings and reaction to what happened as a result ... you know... um, so yeah maybe, you just like want to go around the group and do that and like ... yeah, if you wanna focus more on your character do ... but also if you want to just like, talk about what you just experienced ... and to what extent it was a positive or successful experience, or take in whatever way you want. Maybe do you want to start?

PLAYER OF THE WARRIOR: Yeah sure. Um yeah that was a really interesting experience for me ... I'm training as a psychotherapist, so it's a very familiar context for me. And the sleepiness is something that in my training we've been told can indicate unprocessed emotion in the room ... that is also disowned ... often associated with anger. So in that first role-play that we watched when there were at least two of us

feeling very, very sleepy ... that was a bit of information for me because I was so sleepy ... it was like an unnatural amount of sleepiness. I think maybe later on it was a bit more different because people seemed to be a bit more alert. But like I'm now fascinated about what that ... where that unconscious material comes from. Like to what extent does the fiction lead to some level of unconsciousness ... and then like how much do we attach to that ... so that's the intellectual thought I have. But in terms of my actual character that's not me at all. I really wanted to take on the role of someone who doesn't get into this stuff at all ... is very resistant to introspecting. I think I was inspired by someone I know in my life at the moment who's going through a really hard time but who from ... from my point of view, I really feel like he's not helping himself. And I remember a conversation with my house-mate yesterday about this person being like ... I just ... I just don't understand how people like this can exist in the world. And I really wanted to step into that. And it was such a negative and lonely feeling, and it made me feel more angry towards the end as well ... everyone just seemed to be like, I don't know, like all in on some sort of like ... getting more in-jokes that I just didn't get, and it just seemed like total bullshit from my perspective ... yeah ...

PLAYER OF THE REBEL: Yeah that was really interesting. It's my first time doing like a LARP, it's not my first time role-playing but in a different context. But this ... as in like having this group setting and characters ... it was not like ... it wasn't that easy for me to get into it ... I realised for myself ... but I thought the people who got into it were like really fantastic. And when I made the comment about sincerity, in a way, it's like from my own perspective as myself as much as it is for the character. I kind of felt like I was watching the character a bit and realising that there are certain emotions that he should be having that is very specific to his context. But at the same time I felt like it in my own life as well. So it was kind of a strange experience for me. Yeah.

PLAYER OF THE EXTRA: Um ... yeah... in the same boat haven't done like a LARP thing before ... and I thought the camera was going to be really ... really disconcerting, but kind of once it got going it was fine. I kind of felt like I had to like throw myself in first to actually get into it and kind of do get something from it ... but then what ... as I was doing it ... realized my character wasn't actually that developed particularly ... so it kind of yeah ... got difficult and then you start reaching for stuff that is actually ... have out of the character and is actually from yourself instead ... but yeah kind of lost the focus of where I was going.

PLAYER OF THE HEIR: Didn't seem like that from here.

PLAYER OF THE LOVER: No it was really good.

PLAYER OF THE SPIRITUALIST: That's funny because I felt really similarly to Michael. Like I just threw myself into ... I thought that's going to be the easiest way to get into character.

PLAYER OF THE EXTRA: But yeah ... yeah ... that's good ...

PLAYER OF THE PLEASER: Yeah, I think it was interesting. In some points I felt more engaged than others. I think sometimes I was thinking very hard about ... what ... how my character would react. But like how would she react ... what thoughts she would have. And other times I was just kind of drifting away and then snapping myself out of it. Always thinking in a way about also ... like my body language and it actually made me feel kind of stiff and uncomfortable at some point, because I realise that my character wouldn't like move around too much ... or ... kind of like a stiff character. But I think that also gave me some form of stiffness. Yeah, and I think ... yeah, I think it was interesting because some moments I could relate to my character very well ... and other moments I kind of related it more to myself, so there was this duality. Um, yeah ... no it was very interesting. I think it was like a very intense thinking LARP, like constantly thinking about the character and like realising that ... like more things about the past of the character and I think in the end it turned out quite like ... I think my character had this whole thing about duty and I think she was very resentful for ... for the ... for the feeling that she ... she had this feeling for her whole life that she had to be dutiful to the people in her life. And she was kind of resentful of the people that weren't as loyal or as dutiful. Yeah, I think it was interesting.

PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER: Well, yeah I feel like it went pretty well, considering this is like the first time this is happening in this way. Like everyone kind of like committed to the characters and like ... yeah in really good way. I felt personally, like a sense of, like regret, which is funny because my character was the regretter. I didn't say enough in the kind of introductory bit about what what my story was, and then the rest of the time I was like ... oh shit but how do I connect to what's going on because I hadn't offered enough. And so yeah, I kind of reflected on that. It made me think perhaps it would have been helpful to kind of almost put people on their toes a little bit and be like ... and tell me more about you or something. I don't know I maybe needed that personally ... yeah ...

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: I think I was quite like surprised by my character because

the world I'd built for them actually didn't come out at all ... and I didn't end up saying till right at the end like the core memory that I had about ayahuasca, which actually felt completely disconnected to like I everything I'd built ... which I was kind of annoyed that I ... that I went back, that I finally found like a link because actually they were way more dominant and weren't that empty and actually did have quite a strong personality ... and I would have preferred to stick with that. But the character that I built was like completely vapid and vacant beforehand. So yeah, I was quite surprised that nothing I planned came up. But yeah, I enjoyed it ... I enjoyed it. But yeah I was annoyed by trying to reconnect the dots at the end, basically.

LARP FACILITATOR: Yeah. I think what was interesting watching it, I mean it was kind of like there was this like beautiful irony about the fact that everyone was role-playing. But it felt like so much of the role-play was about the inability people had to play roles or to feel like they had an appropriate ... they'd feel appropriate to play a role in someone's life. And so there this kind of amazing mix of like banality and at times boredom of people not being able ... or wanting to fully kind of be someone else. And yet doing that whilst completely immersing in being someone else. And I think that duality was kind of an amazing and bizarre experience to watch. Um ... yeah, I have a lot of thoughts and I think also being kind of ... also playing the role of director ... really interesting, the whole tension of that feeling of you know ... you want to ... you're making a film and so you want it to be like ... who's going to be ... kind of ... start screaming ... or you know ... I want action ... I want action ... like make it fast and stop ... stop fucking chatting ... keep going ... keep going ... I want to see more. And then ... but then obviously that moment of like realisation about this is exactly what group is actually like. There's a lot of this, you know, some people speak ... some people don't ... some people have to wait till next session these tensions ... I just think it was a very, very realist and successful recreation of that as an experience and I'm really grateful George [*THE THERAPIST*] to you kind of doing that and playing this ... I thought that was really like ... very well done and I had to kind of relinquish control at some point, that I can't make this thing kind of like fake recreation of that ... it has to be, as someone said, clumsy and difficult ... it worked ... it felt very appropriate to me ... interesting...

PLAYER OF THE SPIRITUALIST: Yeah. So I guess my character, like I was saying you know I think my character does get carried away by kind of like ... in group dynamics. That was also why I felt like if I just throw myself into it, you know ... like ... but it did feel like my character does a lot of these things, you know, like gets carried away by group dynamics ... like follows all these wishy-washy, spiritual kind of things ... anything ...

just like grasping at straws because like he feels quite like empty. And as you know, as, like the interactions ... throughout the session ... like all interactions just made me really aware of that about my character, and I thought that was just very interesting and ended up making me feel really empty towards the end. Yeah it was strange. That's why when you finished I was like, thank god I don't have to be that prick anymore.

PLAYER OF THE LOVER: No, I know what you mean. I was like, I was getting like more involved and like ... oh my god ... like you said, I felt I had like done this whole thing and I remember you warning on the phone like ... it's great, but like also don't be disappointed if it doesn't, like if you don't get to like share all that stuff. So that kind of like prepared me somewhat, but I definitely found myself being quite a different person from who I planned, which was weird. So I actually, without like going into too much ... I received the text saying would you like to come to a group therapy LARP while I was at like a group therapy thing. Not because not ... not like kind of ... basically my dad is interested in working in mental health and he was going for research purposes ... and he was like you should join me. And I was like of course I'll join you that sounds cool and like weird. I was not expecting to be involved in the therapy at all. Like I thought I would be kind of helping him. And like it turns out I wasn't really needed to help him. So I was roped in to like a lot of this ... anyways, I found myself more so than the character that I had prepared, who was like kind of a bimbo ... more of a bimbo than what I was manifesting ... being like all of the people that I found there that were like eerily comfortable and like ... or, you know, like trying to kind of fashion like a space that they were kind of imagining ... and like in real life has made me feel like incredibly alienated and uncomfortable. So it was kind of nice to be a character like that in a way ... but also obviously like find a lot of your actual self coming into it.

PLAYER OF THE HEIR: Yeah ... yeah I feel like a lot of things that happened are just real. And I think the less like stuck we are to our ideas of our character the better. But it's kind of hard because you have to hold on to like specific things like what they do, who they love, etc. without holding on to the idea behind the character and why they love that way. Because when you focus too much on those things, these kind of vacuous statements come out, which I think is like hard to avoid almost unless you really like ... I think if there's more physical things at the beginning, like in the previous LARP, it's much easier to ... to inhabit the character and to be less cerebral about it. But this setting I suppose ... is really interesting. But the setting of being in a semi-circle, which the only reason there's a semi-circle is because of the camera's right? Otherwise there'd be a circle.

LARP FACILITATOR: Yes and no. Yes and no in the sense that it would have worked as a circle but we also ... the notion of ... especially in a lot of therapeutic role-play there's a strong notion of the stage, and the separation of the audience and the stage.

PLAYER OF THE HEIR: But would it be in a circle?

LARP FACILITATOR: No in psychodrama it's like you have a theatre and an audience ... in a very ... like even more completely non-traditional group than this.

PLAYER OF THE HEIR: Yeah, but yeah I think ... yeah ... I don't know if they do lots of physical exercises but I think it would have ... it's actually really useful to do those at the beginning because even that brief meditation to me was extremely useful. And to have just something to combine that with something physical maybe. But it was great, obviously really interesting.

PLAYER OF THE DEBATER: I ... like for my character I ... I had such an idea like from the outset of how like ... like just self-centeredness was such a big aspect of it ... but also like a certain lack of self-awareness ... which is like a really bizarre combination basically, that ended up manifesting completely differently to how I imagined ... like, you know, being flippant when other people are talking and that kind of thing. And then by the end I kind of felt completely desolate, because I was really like thinking about ... because I really did feel quite genuinely effected by some of the resolutions and some of the arguments happening ... and I just felt like instead of being this kind of like brow-beating ... like ... oh I'm right about everything ... like there was just a genuine moment of reflection where I was like I ruined my life ... but I was like as this character ... and I was like wow. So it ended up being this way more like internal thing ... than just like I don't know ... so it definitely did manifest very differently ... but I ended up feeling quite intense by the end ... yeah ...

PLAYER OF THE STORYTELLER: Yeah. I kind of relate to what Bart [*THE LARP FACILITATOR*] said like maybe because I was also aware of the cameras ... I sort of wanted it to be like ... action go, go, go ... like there's this expectation when something's being filmed or maybe not even when it's being filmed ... I think that did definitely contribute to it, that things should move at this particular pace ... and yeah, I definitely ... I felt ... I felt sleepy at times ... I even actually felt sleepy at points when I was in the middle, which I couldn't believe ... that I think ... I don't know if I ... yeah, I need to think about what ... why ... that was because ... it wasn't that I didn't ... I didn't not want to engage with my character ... and I was really invested in her like resolving

things. But, um, what I said at the end was also completely true to how I felt, which is that I did feel like this mixture of alienated and also comforted, and maybe that just came from ... um ... yeah, I don't know ... not knowing people's characters, feeling strange about sharing things and maybe other people ... than therefore not being able to share things and feeling selfish in that way, even if it's like by mistake, you still kind of feel like that ... but I thought it was very ... yeah, I feel strange ...

LARP FACILITATOR: To specifically ... to pick up on the point did anyone who let's say was less active ... had any moment where in or out of character they were like ... like actively irritated at the central force ... like I want to... I want to take agency. I want to take control or I want to be the centre, and I'm not getting to be the centre and I'm angry on some primal level. Was there any feeling of that?

PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER: Deep down ... very deep ... it was somewhere ... but it wasn't going to come out ...

PLAYER OF THE LOSER: So yeah, I found that pretty exhausting as well ... um I ... I found the urge to laugh at a few points ... when your character kind of like ... kind of came out of nowhere [*referring to THE BURNOUT*] ... yeah ... my character oscillated between, like ... intense, like, self-loathing and judgement of others ... and I ... yeah I was like, I was very like ... you know I felt very uncomfortable, like tried to make that, like, physically like known as opposed to like saying anything ... because, like, my character wouldn't have been comfortable saying anything. But yeah ... it would have been cool to have been more involved. But I feel like internally there was like involvement.

PLAYER OF THE SUCCESS: Um ... I ... like you said [*referring to THE PLEASER*] I found my head full of that and like not like any other thoughts at all. And I didn't think I realised until we did the meditation at the end, that I had actually quite progressed quite into her head and she's definitely like quite shallow ... and I think it was quite nice and like relieving in my person ... like in my actual life like not to think for a bit. And then as soon as we like went into the light at the end, I literally had like a rush of all my normal anxieties come back. And I was like okay great she's back ... so it was actually quite therapeutic. Like for me, I'd actually love to do this as like myself as well. I think it would be so good to like sit there and to have an argument with people like I want to argue with ... that'd be good ...

PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST: Yeah ... I found that very strange. I found like I don't

know if like I was trying like to be ... have as much like ... an undirectorial like a role as possible I think ... and that's part of why I think at times I felt a bit bored. I felt like I was just like ... I felt like I didn't ... I felt like, for example, like had I been more able to ... to change the course of events ... I would have been interested in characters like Thibault's [*THE LOSER*] ... like the more withdrawn characters coming forward. And I feel like just because of ... of how the group dynamic was, naturally just the people who were the most willing to come and talk about their stuff came up ... and ... yeah, no I think it was ... it was very ... there were some really interesting moments. But it definitely ... I was also interested in how like everyone was like ... like what people were ... I was intrigued by like how in a sense, almost as like I was like ... the labour of this is like, you know, you have been given this character and you're this character and you're playing this character. And it's interesting how that kind of creates like an avenue to be like narcissistic in like a ... in like a necessary way. Like, well I have been asked to come and play this character so I have to be faithful to this character. And I feel like a lot of that manifested as like I'm only interested in my own character. And I felt like people were like ... so like, invested in their own roles that I ... I was incredibly struck by like [*referring to THE STORYTELLER and THE HEIR*] you guys having that conversation as children which was like very ... actually was like they did have some kind of effect. But I was just ... I thought, like, what you said was like horrifying [*referring to THE STORYTELLER*] ... you being like, I've never felt like I can ever be honest with you. And that was just totally not even acknowledged ... we're a team ... and I was like ... and I just realised that everyone's so preoccupied with like being the roles but they're not paying attention to one another. But I think that's actually pretty relevant to real group therapy which I've done ... where like people are just so narcissistic and they're not very interested in one another's problems ... so like it almost made that alot more intense. But then there were like these really interesting moments ... like I really just ... I couldn't stand you [*referring to THE SPIRITUALIST*] ... I felt like as a therapist I needed to like ... I needed to like ... obviously I couldn't treat you badly ... it was that bit like ... I also had to step in because you did literally over-step projection wise and started trying to suggest that Vanessa was having some kind of cosmically bad ... I have to, like, tell this guy off but how do I do it in a way that isn't going to tell everyone how fucking much I hate him yeah ... yeah but maybe that's because you totally got me with forgetting to say Eric's name at the beginning. You were like ... what about Eric!? ... I thought about asking you and Eric to swap seats because I thought maybe I could kill two birds with one stone ... but then I didn't ... because I thought it was a bit too much.

PLAYER OF THE SPIRITUALIST: You should have done that ...

PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST: Yeah ... yeah ...

LARP FACILITATOR: I think that there's definitely, like, way more questions I could ask and discussions we could have. I really appreciate and acknowledge it has been quite a long session. Um, so I think like we can ... end it at this point, after everyone's like, said there bit ... I mean we can keep going but as said I feel like you've been going for a while. Um ... so maybe ... yeah, maybe if ... what I wanted to say was that, as many people mentioned, this has been in a sense an experiment of doing role-play which invites people to, in a sense, almost silently have an interior experience of being someone else which maybe isn't even activated in the space ... but is very much like ... like, yeah, it's experienced nonetheless even if it isn't seen in a traditional sense. So I really ... I'm going to create a Google doc with times ... and if anyone would be willing to do ... just like a Zoom video call ... and would be willing to just take me more specifically into their experience of it ... whether that be positive or negative ... the specifics of their character ... maybe if you could just like at the end of today ... before you go to bed make a little note of what you've felt or experienced ... so let's say it happens in a week or two so you still have some some notion of remembering ... of what happened ... so you just remember some of those details and the little narrative of your character, and then we can kind of go over that in more detail. Um, yeah and ... but at the same time, if you don't want to do that, if you feel like you've got enough out of this and you're really done, don't feel obligated in anyway ... it's just an open invitation for anyone who'd be ... I'd really appreciate it if you'd be up for taking me a little bit more through your thought process ... both in and out of character. But, um, yeah, again, thank you so much for being involved.

The LARP session comes to an end, participants get up from their chairs and exit the room.













excerpts from participant interviews

After the LARP participants were invited to go into further detail in relation to their thoughts about - and experiences of - the session. The following are a series of excerpts taken from the conversations between the LARP facilitator and those who volunteered to be interviewed.

1. PLAYER OF THE WARRIOR (24/04/2023)

LARP FACILITATOR: And to what extent do you feel like in terms of LARPing someone who's disengaged, not being very vocal ... not being very active ... like to what extent did you feel capable to embody that space? Or to what extent, in a sense, to successfully LARP as a character do you need to feel a sense of engagement and activation?

PLAYER OF THE WARRIOR: Yeah ... I think it was a very successful LARP as far as my character is concerned. Because the ... the lack of engagement, the boredom ... you know that was a very palpable feeling. And I think boredom is real, I think boredom is a very, very important emotion to feel as a human being. And the fact that the boredom ... then actually gave way to a sort of anger and that resentment that I've named towards the end means that there was something more to it as well. There was something that was quite relational about it or you know it was coming from a lack of connecting and it ... and actually if I was to connect that kind of disconnection feeling to some of my own experiences as myself, that's a very painful feeling. Like alienation is extremely painful feeling to have. Like I have a lot of bad memories from my childhood associated with that feeling. I'm not saying that I necessarily felt like the intensity of that as Melissa, but ... there's some sort ... there's some sort of connection there.

LARP FACILITATOR: So did you feel in any way that you were tapping into that ... that like subconsciously on some level, are you ... when you're experiencing that in role and you have a real experience of it, did ... is that something you reconnected with?

PLAYER OF THE WARRIOR: I think it's possible you know, like, obviously I'm only making it conscious now like in this conversation with you as we're talking about it. But I ... I don't see why not. I'm actually ... I'm trying to go ... yeah I'm trying to just kind of sit with that for a bit as we're talking. So there ... so for me ... again, speaking as

myself ... I think there's a numbness, or like a kind of like desensitisation that comes over my like affective responses, which is very much like a process of my mind overriding my feelings ... which through my own therapeutic work I am starting to understand what was a very early defence response that I had as a child to feeling alienated in my surroundings due to kind of I guess just like culture shock and stuff, when I was very young. And that has stayed with me for a lifetime and I'm currently in the process of like deprogramming myself from that and like reopening myself up to like somatic experience, and just being a lot more kind of fluid and open and porous with my emotional responses to things as well as my kind of like energetic barriers. And that's all connected to this kind of yeah, like primordial sense of alienation if you like ... that I think is a very universal feeling and which in my character self I was totally in that ... I was totally in that as Melissa. And also if you think about like the kind of group therapy constellation or any constellation of people that come together for the first time as ... a template on which any member of that group will automatically project there earliest experiences of some sort of group constellation that has left an indelible mark on the way that they are in groups then yeah, that's exactly what happened. But it's like so meta because even though I was playing a character that ... who wasn't myself, I'm still tapping into my actual person's like group constellation programming if you like, to kind of just like give me a little bit of like ... I don't know, give me a little bit of like embodied context for being my character.

2. PLAYER OF THE REBEL (27/04/2023)

PLAYER OF THE REBEL: The character's name is Joshua who was the archetype of the rebel ... um which you know I think the introduction wasn't that ... it wasn't as detailed or expansive as I would like to go. So, you know, what I'm going say is probably, like, quite different from what ... what the character appeared at that time. So yeah the Joshua character was I think we discussed that ... I mean, we discussed one of the before ... one thing before is that he's like kind of a diaspora Asian person, and he kind of like takes a lot of pride in his anglicised name and kind of like wants to move away from his heritage or his roots. So that was actually the character ... and he's also ... I mean, some of the backstory I have is that, you know, he's like a ... he's not in school, he's not going to work, he doesn't ... yeah he's unemployed or like ... as he likes to say in between jobs. And ... but he's pretty comfortable because he got like a pretty good inheritance ... I mean, a fairly decent inheritance from like ... like a grandfather or something. So, yeah, that's the character in the ... in the story. I mean, in that time frame he's estranged from his family, like his parents. And that's kind of the conflict that I was trying to work on for the ... his character. I mean, aside from that,

like a party boy, a massive coke user ... really messy, like, kind of like really destructive when he's like pinging ... yeah. And the back story, the dad is ... it's a bit convoluted, but they basically just have a really bad relationship for like most of his adult life because when he was younger as a teenager, he had a relationship with ... he had like a ... one of those childhood romance kind of things ... that wasn't like super serious but it was with someone that his parents were like ... his dad was very, uh, disapproving of ... so it was like ... it was actually like, I mean, in my mind like the back-story is that ... the romantic interest was just someone who is like neurodivergent and his dad just had, like you know ... just couldn't accept that ... just kind of had like a very pure idea or like a very conservative idea of like family. You know like ... yeah just a very conservative idea of, like, who ... who ... who his kids should get involved with basically. And it's also a very like problematic perspective of course. So that caused a rupture that never quite um ... recovered basically, never got repaired. And prior to the ... therapy session ... one of the inciting incidents that caused him to go to the therapy was basically getting really, really high and like getting in contact with his father in like a really aggressive way. Like, yeah basically that caused him to like maybe reflect ... reflect on it in the morning to come get clean and kind of like trying to resolve this long standing problem ... yeah.

LARP FACILITATOR: And so, okay, so there's this kind of like a crisis point as it were, which leads to this desire to ... to make amends. So that's the kind of starting point entering into the group ... and then, like ... yeah, maybe just help take me through your experience in character of what happens for ... for them during the experience. How did they ... what is their kind of journey during it and maybe their reaction to it as an experience ...

PLAYER OF THE REBEL: You mean the character ... the character's?

LARP FACILITATOR: Yeah.

PLAYER OF THE REBEL: So I think that was great actually, when you went to the guided meditation right. Like there was a really nice, very fluid dive into the character. You were like saying imagine the space that they were living in, and like coming into their shoes and walking out of the door and all that stuff. I think there was a lot of like trepidation on the character's part to go to do this thing. And then once actually there I think was I quite nervous, which is ... if I imagine it is kind of like a ... you know, for someone who is decoratively like a rebellious type or if like very ... I don't know how I put it ... maybe like antisocial kind of disposition you know forced to ... someone like that

being forced to be quite sincere in introducing themselves and, like you know talking about it ... obviously also wanting to do it but it's not something that comes very easily. So I think there was a lot of like awkwardness and nervousness in that scenario, just like trying to voice out certain things that ... he would never have voiced out. He would never have like expressly said. Yeah and for the most part I think he was like pretty closed off, like he was a very closed off character. A lot of the things that occurred, like some of the things that occurred within the other role-plays is triggering in the sense that you know it dredged up like old memories that were not clear for a long time. Like a lot of the back story was like really suppressed or like really buried that, you know ... I mean, it's like I was trying to inhabit the character as much as I can, and I can ... I don't know ... imagine what kind of like ... play out the ... perform the role of like bearing all these things and then when it slowly gets revealed throughout the ... the ... the role ... the therapy session, his behaviour becomes a bit ... I mean, maybe it's not like so obvious, but I guess the character kind of like ... is forced to slowly confront all of these things within himself as it goes on. And then towards the end ... I mean, I know very well that I think I only had one interaction in the whole time and it was when Bea's character said that she felt really alienated, or like this is all kind of like nonsensical to her. And then I remember ... this strong urge to kind of be like no, actually, I don't think it is like that. I think that even if a lot of this seems like fake or like pretentious or, you know, just like very distant from me and played out by other people ... that the sincerity of people within the space, like the fact that people are there and like they are trying to like act out this role-play ... is enough to make believe that a lot of these emotions or like issues are real and they are relatable to me. So that was kind of the ... yeah, it kind of felt like an arc in a way for the character ... yeah.

3. PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT (27/04/2023)

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: So afterwards, I think it's the most unpleasant LARP I've done. Like I had I didn't feel ... I didn't like what I like was ... I didn't ... it was quite an ugly LARP because it's ... it's a ... it's a vulnerable context. So ... my character went on a bit of a tangent I didn't expect. I spoke a lot more than I anticipated. I also don't think I ... I thought I'd be one of the most vocal. Which may be just in myself I didn't feel totally comfortable with, on reflection that I was ... yeah, because I guess there's a conflict with that ... because the thing I've actually disliked about LARPs in the past have been when I feel people are ... pushing their own character arc at the expense of, I don't know, the kind of relationships you could form if you just kept it a little more low-key. So I kind of felt like I'd fallen into that, which didn't make me feel good as Sabrina after. I really did feel alot during it. I felt the compulsion to be angry at that guy when he

was talking about telling his dad that vulnerable thing ... like I did feel that in me, even though that's not how I would react. I did feel like upset when I heard a couple other characters speaking about role-playing like a first ... like a jealousy situation later on. I was quite shocked at how much I felt that I was feeling Vanessa's progression throughout the session. And, like, just in my body. But me as Sabrina did not enjoy being ... I guess the more demonised character of the group. I didn't enjoy it. I didn't feel 100% comfortable in it because I guess ... there is a thing about the lines between fiction and fact that is like ... LARP is interesting because that could be your first interaction with a lot of people, and to then move out of it and shed that person entirely that a lot of people have not liked for the last 3 hours or two and a half hours is ... a bit of ... it like it just makes you feel a little unstable in yourself. But it was an interesting dynamic. I wasn't bored. I personally felt that's the most into a character I've been and the most genuine to a character that I've been. And ... yeah ... yeah.

LARP FACILITATOR: I think ... I think it's interesting what you're saying about this feeling of like ... this ... the fear of playing the kind of demonised character. And that feeling of maybe potentially feeling ... yeah the kind of bleed into how people perceive you outside of it. But I in many ways feel that the people who play those characters, they kind of drive the narrative ... you know they're so needed, that I don't think there is any ... I don't think you should necessarily feel ... I understand the feeling, but I feel like you shouldn't ... like hold yourself back from playing those characters, because actually I think a lot of people are very grateful that someone did it, you know ... and it brings a lot to the table and it adds a lot to the dynamic when people aren't just playing nice. And I think with this LARP especially what was so kind of strange about ... about it was the fact that unlike let's say an open sandbox free-form LARP where you can walk around a space and you engage with whoever you want to engage with ... we're sitting as a group and there is no space to engage with anyone other than within the parameters of that group. And so when you make the decision to speak ... someone else, everyone else has to be silent. And so every active decision to participate becomes something that in a sense, it's something ... it means that someone else can't for that moment participate. So there's this ... it kind of like ... it opens up this kind of politics of like ... of discourse and ... and being active within the group ... where, like you either are being dominant or passive. There's no real like two ways about it. You do have to take a stand. You are either the one who's going to be more quiet and let the more dominant figures take ... take the reins or you end up wanting to engage, but as a result, having to take on this kind of burden of responsibility of being the dominant one, which I think was interesting in terms of this specific role play.

...

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: I think Vanessa was definitely like a version of myself probably, like at different points in my life. Definitely. And maybe that's where the unpleasant feeling came from as well, because maybe it was a little close to a version of myself that I don't really like or associate with anymore.

LARP FACILITATOR: Interesting so ... so it's like it's not necessarily like LARP is an extension of yourself ... it's more like ... but there are parts of yourself that go into the character and not necessarily parts of you as now but parts of you that have existed ... like previous selves that you're kind of tapping into on some level.

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: Yeah, I think so ... I think so because I don't feel that person ... there's like certain specific physical feelings I could relate to who I am now and Vanessa ... like ... like a feeling of like bubbling anger or like, you know more just ... the kind of discomfort with the speed of things ... the on-edginess I felt as her and as me before anything had happened, when we were like explaining things and people were nodding and being supersensitive like ... that I ... even now like I can feel myself feeling a particular way about it and that's how I felt about it in there as Vanessa as well. So specific things are me now, specific things were me then ... yeah, I don't ... some views I definitely don't agree with but ... yeah, it was just kind of like a patchwork of myself, I guess, at different times of my life.

LARP FACILITATOR: I wonder yeah ... I wonder why that would be ... why would it be the case that that would ... it would open up ... because I think for some people it can be a means of tapping into things that they haven't been able to express in their lives but have deep down wanted to express ... like a kind vehicle of ... of achieving or being something that they can't be in their day to day lives. I'd say, like traditionally with LARP, it would be like let's say having like a boring job in I.T. but then, you know, once a month you get to go out and be this great leader with huge power who is, you know ... and all this kind of stuff. But for you you're kind of saying it's almost just like ... in your intuitive desire to ... to embody and be someone you bring the resources of your emotions and the things that you've experienced to it. And as a result ... it might kind of trigger something from your past or something like that, as a kind of like emotional resource that you tap into while ... while playing a character. Is that right?

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: Yeah I do ... yeah I think to a degree like, I think every character I've played has been slightly obnoxious. And from listening to what you're

like saying now, I wonder if LARP is an opportunity for me to be my most obnoxious self which is true to myself on some levels but needs to be suppressed in order to be a likeable human being who operates in society. And like it's an opportunity for me to just be kind of ugly and not worry about the consequences of that ugliness. Because I guess all of us like can be egotistical and self-obsessed and ... this, that and the other. Like I've definitely played a couple ... like overly opinionated, passive aggressive or just aggressive like ... all traits that I've had or have and that like simmers somewhere else, because obviously you keep these things under control and in check. And LARP for me feels like an opportunity to just ... let it go and be this person that is usually ... unpleasant. Slightly unpleasant. I've only once played someone who isn't ... that isn't like a leading character trait. And ... I don't know it feels ... it feels both nice and gross simultaneously, because I know that it's not totally alien to me ... the things that I'm embodying.

LARP FACILITATOR: Hm ... but is it cathartic to be able to release that instinct, or that urge?

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. I definitely ... definitely think it's cathartic. I really enjoy it. So it must be ... yeah.

LARP FACILITATOR: Yeah. I mean, yeah I don't know if it's ... yeah I think, I don't know to what extent it's ... it's healthy to kind of ... I mean, obviously we live in a society and we have to keep these like different urges in check. But I think it's ... it's ... there's something kind of interesting ... but in a way it's kind of interesting though, this kind of conversation about live action role-play because it's like ... to say that this is a space where you can kind of be someone that you wouldn't otherwise be able to be in society ... but in a way, you know, in LARP, we're still building a society right ... we're still building like a group or a social contract, or like a world together ... and we're coming with these kind of different instincts. I still think there is still ... there's some notion of like ... our relations to other people in LARP. And I think there's something quite interesting about the tension between that individual desire to express or be someone that you normally can't be, or do something that you want to do and kind of focus on yourself but also be like ... it's also fundamentally a social act live action role-play, it's not something you do on your own. And so did you feel any sense ... what was your kind of ... in terms of being able to, like, release or play out that obnoxiousness that you kind of describe ... do you think that ... and in a sense kind of playing up the character who's not afraid of conflict ... do you think that in any way that that hindered your ability to feel connected to other players and characters or do you

think it just enhanced the experience?

PLAYER OF THE BURNOUT: I would say ... it's interesting that you said that because I have really thought about this as an individual experience like up until now. And you said this in the call beforehand of like the importance of building the context of our interpersonal relationships and ... I was finding that difficult as well. So yeah, I think ... I think it's ... I don't think I've found it easy to connect to ... the other people. And I guess I'd built my character slightly around that ... my character was built slightly around the inability to empathise, but ... yeah it did hinder ... it hindered.

LARP FACILITATOR: But then that just adds another ... like that rich tapestry to it, you know, of ... of play. Like, I think there's a lot of really interesting conversations about whether LARP needs conflict or not. And some people really believe ... you know, they see it as a driving force that you need those figures who cause those clashes ... and manyLARPs are based on those kind of points of conflict. And then there's other people who say why are people so conflict obsessed ... why can't we create a kind of ... why do we use this to bring out the worse side of ourselves when we could use this as a kind of semi-utopian space of like positivity and collaboration. And I don't really know where I stand on that. I just think it's an interesting thing to think about.

4. PLAYER OF THE LOVER (28/04/2023)

PLAYER OF THE LOVER: I definitely it ... again maybe just like a symptom of my character, but I definitely found myself trying to like micromanage. How I was like ... okay if I put this in now will it ... will it kind of ... like, what will it do to the LARP? Will it like give, you know, give an opportunity to like you know ... you know like in Scrabble when you want to go in a particular place so that you can like branch off in a better way ... as opposed to like starting up there ... and you like know where to go. I was kind of trying to do that, which is not ... I know that's not really what I was supposed to be doing, but I was definitely being a bit strategic or I was trying to be at least about the kind of like ... the kind of contributions I was making.

LARP FACILITATOR: I don't think you should say that it's ... you shouldn't have been doing that. I think that there's so many varied ways of engaging with LARP. And I think that, you know, for some people it is method acting and always staying true to character ... for other people the character becomes a vessel by which they get to kind of explore and play in a way that they want to play. So in that ... let's say the way that you're in a video game, you have an avatar ... but fundamentally that avatar just

becomes a vehicle for you to kind of do what you want to do ... let's say in GTA ... let's say you want to suddenly break away from the narrative and just like go shoot up a bunch of people and steal a car and some people play LARP more like that ... where I think there's more of a sense of ... this becomes a kind of ... an opportunity or structure, or framework to explore more freely ... something that they desire to do, and the character becomes a mechanism for doing that, if that makes sense.

PLAYER OF THE LOVER: Yeah ... yeah ... that does make sense.

LARP FACILITATOR: So I think it's interesting. I think that for you it was very much about like ... you constructed the character and the character is very familiar to you, and then feeling some sense of feeling structured or restrained or wanting to live up to that character. But the kind of irony is, is that none of us know that character other than you. So it's like we wouldn't know whether you were breaking the ... for you there was this notion of this is a true being and I need to I need to stay faithful to that, which I think is really interesting.

PLAYER OF THE LOVER: No, completely. I really wanted it to be consistent and the girl that was playing the archetype person ... I remember being like ... she said that she ... she'll probably say in her interview ... but that she like had decided prior that she was going to bring in like an ayahuasca trip thing. And then she like did it at the end. But it actually like felt like it really undermined the whole thing that she had kind of spontaneously built, and she was really like mad at herself. And I had like ... I had elements of feeling that way. And it's like ... it's like really frustrating. I don't know why. But clearly, clearly it's a thing of like really wanting to stay true to this. I don't know if you just you feel like you're, like, undermining the ... like the integrity of the ... of the simulation if you kind of introduce these like rogue elements that don't ... that don't jibe ... but then like in real life we have the rogue elements like all the time. So yeah, it was interesting.

LARP FACILITATOR: And I think this LARP became a simulation. But you know, manyLARPs are more fictionalisations or dramatisations rather than simulations.

5. PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST (29/04/2023)

LARP FACILITATOR: And in terms of someone who, as you were kind of saying having had personal experience with group, I mean how ... to what extent do you think people were ... was it like a successful representation or kind of simulation of it? Was

it in some ways quite different and kind of like dramatised or exaggerated in other ways? Like to what extent do you feel like it was a successful mirror or was it something else ... I mean, obviously the process is radically different from ... it's not ... I'm not saying that you've done therapeutic role-play, but I guess in times of like the intention and nature of the characters.

PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST: Well, I think it was quite like group ... in fact I mean, I think it's ... like ... it was ... I think actually people were probably more forthcoming than they would have been in an ... in ... in my experience of first sessions of groups. However ... also with ... the one thing about group that ... was distinct is that in my experience people enter one at a time into a system where there's already a few other people who have been there for longer than them. So it was an interesting experience of like everyone arriving and being there for the first time. That was quite unique about it. And ... and that ... but that also seems like that seems continuous with the particular forms of group therapy that you were using as sources of influence. So I couldn't really comment on that but ... I thought it was ... I mean, I think the thing is like the motivations between group therapy and a LARP ... they are both conflicting and actually I think they also kind of bolster one another. And I think in a sense, like the fact that it was a LARP and that like ... you know maybe I hadn't, but it seemed like a few ... quite a few of the other people like were in the in the habit of ... of LARPing ... and ... I think that gave it ... like an interesting ... I think it kind of redefined like the limits of like a group therapy situation, you know, because there was a hell of a lot more potential for back-story. But then there was maybe less of a certain or less ... I think it's like ... yeah it's interesting ... like you have like ... you can basically like ... I mean, in the context of a LARP like ... people could have had like ... you know, extremely ... people could have had like very unorthodox, traumatic backgrounds in a way that in a regular group therapy session everyone's ... everyone's past is already defined ... or within like their own perceptions of ... or memories of ... whereas like this, this gave one the opportunity to say if ... if one was ... I mean, I was interested by this like ... this idea of like ... instead of like in a ... in a group therapy session, you can be prompted to, like remember something ... or you can be prompted to have a perception, whereas in the LARP you could potentially be prompted to invent a memory that was perfectly suited as a response, you know, like ... you know what I mean? Like in group therapy, like, you're waiting for an opportunity to find indentifications with the other group members and ... and that obviously means that there's often a lot of lulls. And those ... and I think it makes me see those lulls are important. But in a LARP session, you have potential to identify with literally everything that everyone says, because you can ... you can ... you can source any memory, any individual characteristic necessary

to have an identification.

LARP FACILITATOR: Yeah, that's interesting. I mean I think ... I mean, kind of what you were saying was interesting, in terms of making me think about this idea that in a way what's also kind of like interesting about using LARP as a kind of vehicle to explore kind of structures and social relations that exist within the context of group therapy is that in a sense group therapy is a form of ... of storytelling, right? Like, it's based on real narratives but it's a group of people coming together to express or in some ways construct narratives or means of discussing or talking about their lives in ways that can be communicated and understood as, in a sense, a form of narrative or storytelling. So I think there's something really interesting which I hadn't kind of thought of before, but I think there is an interesting link there. And then to what you were saying about this idea that, like you could hypothetically ... the difference, I guess, right in LARP is the story isn't made already. A lot of people were saying how much creative ... like they had some idea of their character but creativity and spontaneity really drove how they acted within the context of the group. But it's really interesting to see how I think other people really did have this notion of staying true to their character. And so some people, let's say the character of Michael, you know goes up to the centre of the space but he doesn't know whether he should talk to his mother or his father and there's a sense of ... his character struggles with the kind of parameters of being able to truly embody or become his father ... and or the case of Erik as well, who's someone who's struggled to engage and a couple of other characters who people played ... there's a lot of the less active characters they were still very active and still had these strong character developments. It's just they felt that their character wouldn't have been the kind of person who arrived at an initial setting of a therapy group and take the lead.

PLAYER OF THE THERAPIST: I think that's really ... You know, I think that's ... I think that's something I found very ... I found that inspiring how people were able to ... to take a passive role as a way of being true to like who they were. I found that inspiring. Yeah, and actually I mean ... it's interesting listening to like what your ... your reflection there. Like ... I had a very kind of ... two very kind of conflicting thoughts. My first thought in response to you talking about the ... the narrative storytelling quality, was to add this idea of like adaptation and how like I think a group therapy is very much like you ... it is a form of narrative and storytelling but it's a form of narrative and storytelling where you are constantly working in the first draft. And you're not necessarily adhering to like beginning, middle and end. And you're also constantly changing it, from session to session. Because ... and that's not because people are making things up... it's because they're having different aspects they're seeing, you

know, seeing different aspects of it. And ... and that reconfigures the whole quite a lot ... the whole ... I don't know how I feel about the idea of the whole, but anyway it reconfigures things. But then when you were talking about how people were feeling this need to be true to their characters. I was just thinking about how I think I was ... I mean I watched a film with a friend last night. And he didn't ... he didn't like the film and I did like the film, and the reason he didn't like the film was he felt ... he did not feel convinced by some of the characters, by some of the writing. And I liked it because I enjoyed how it obviously just wasn't ... it wasn't like ... it wasn't interested in meeting like the conventional standards of like verisimilitude, I guess in like films. And I think this like a really interesting thing about LARP, and I think it's a really interesting thing about just like our general relationship with like, you know the fictional stuff that we consume ... but like we do feel like this strong need to be consistent in our fictional identifications. And in our ... and you know we have these expectations of fiction that it be consistent and believable etc. and I think that could be something that actually holds you back from, for example, in group therapy that's a chance for people to come and in a safe environment be their least consistent selves, because they don't have to present as consistent. And I think that ... I think I was really interested in this tension between like the ... the kind of in a ... in a purely like ... just in terms of like getting it done like a ... and getting it done properly ... like perhaps like a over-literal reading of like who you are in your role. But then like your unconscious desires as to like manifest what's necessary to get a return ... you know. And that's where I found like these passive people who didn't ... who were true to their characters. That's why I find them inspiring sitting back. But I see that like it's ... but then I also feel like I'd like one of them to have seen a potential to maybe change those circumstances for themselves. But I think fair enough that ... that could wait for further sessions.

6. PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER (01/05/2023)

LARP FACILITATOR: Maybe you could tell me a bit more ... when you were talking about this idea of like performance ... I think that's interesting in terms of ... because I mean, you've previously told me that you've had some experience of acting. What would you say coming from that background ... the experience of ... of LARPing was like ... and did it feel in any way different or did it feel just like an extension of acting?

PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER: Well, I was conscious not to be too actory with it ... I did like a method acting short course like two years ago and I did that less as like I wanna learn how to act and more like I ... I kind of wanted that ... kind of weird meta experience of like becoming a character or having having like a space to

become a character. So yeah, this was much more like ... like method acting and in a way more ... more effective than method. I think LARPing in general was more effective than method acting because it's the idea of playing or role-playing rather than like performance. So yeah, I ... I try quite hard to kind of come into it from that angle of like ... yeah not being myself but ... but kind of playing. So yeah it didn't ... it didn't feel like acting and I didn't want to make it a big performance either, because you can get quite ego ... ego-ey with that stuff. And I like the fact that it's about the group dynamic.

LARP FACILITATOR: So you think it was more effective than your experience of method?

PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER: Oh yeah for sure ... for sure. I mean LARPing in general has always been more effective than any method acting experience I've had. But if I think about this particular performance ... I think yeah I think it was effective for me personally. But you know also everybody's kind of ... I have no idea what like experience of performance people in that group had ... but I felt like everybody came into it with a similar mindset of just becoming the character. So I think it ... it did work. There was like a willingness to participate from pretty much everybody.

LARP FACILITATOR: And so what ... because method ... would I be correct in saying that method is taking ... or like in a sense almost like emotionally harvesting previous memories or experiences that you've had and channelling that into expressing the emotions of being another person ...

PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER: Yeah, it's almost like a form of therapy, but they just don't call it that. So yeah, it all felt quite interconnected actually.

LARP FACILITATOR: Whilst LARPing I guess would I mean you could channel your own emotions into constructing a kind of effective performance as part of your character, but I think fundamentally LARP is opening up more interesting questions about the ability that we have to become a different ... truly become a different person. Because method, I think, seems to me at least more about ... it still very much defines the notion of you.

PLAYER OF THE REGRETTER: Yeah and it's about control as well. Like how well you can control the separation between yourself and the character ... whereas LARPing is like full ... full immersion ... which yeah, it's way more effective ... you do ... if you sort of let it happen in quite a kind of almost like yogic way you can kind of ... yeah become

somebody different for a little bit.

7. PLAYER OF THE STORYTELLER (03/05/2023)

PLAYER OF THE STORYTELLER: I think that when I left the LARP ... so I initially felt guilt. Then when I left I felt fine. And then about two days later I felt so guilty again and I felt really weird. And I think that the presence of the cameras played quite a big part in that, because suddenly my character's dominance didn't exist just once but it existed infinite times. And I ... my awareness of that ... that ... it wasn't just in that space, but that it's ... potentially... that ... that kind of dominant ... like ought or, you know ... receiving therapy at the expense of other people. That that's just sort of happening again and again and again in like the cyberspace of videos. And that, I think, is what gave me my second wave of guilt ... of weird ... I don't know if it was guilt, it was like an ick. And then having had some distance from that I think I've made peace with it. Because, as you say, two people had ... had to do it. And remembering that ... it's also ... I am my character, but also my character isn't me.

LARP FACILITATOR: Yeah.

PLAYER OF THE STORYTELLER: And so I don't think it would stop me from taking a role like that in a LARP again.

LARP FACILITATOR Good I don't think it should. I mean, I think ... I mean there's a whole other kind of conversation about how ... what the camera does to a LARP and does it become a form of improvisatory theatre and all these kind of things ... I don't think it actually did, I think it did function as a ... it really felt like I was shooting a documentary ... it really ... it had the kind of ... it wasn't ... people were not performing to the camera. People were being very sincere about being them ... being there. I mean was that your sense of ... of the experience or would you have a different ...

PLAYER OF THE STORYTELLER: When I was ... when I was in the room I ... I wasn't thinking about the cameras. I wasn't thinking about how I looked on camera. I wasn't thinking ... I thought at the beginning maybe I should think about the way my body is positioned towards the camera to get ... to make sure they get a good shot, like for your sake. But then I forgot about it. And I think that's good. I felt ... I felt very ... I didn't ... I didn't feel stressed by the cameras. It was only afterwards that I started to think about the way that they ... the way that cameras meant that everything that happened in that space didn't just exist there but existed ... everywhere in some way.

LARP FACILITATOR: I think maybe ... there's a kind of unknown quality to it because I mean there just really aren't that many LARP films ... and I think there is still a sense that it's quite an intimate or private experience in some way ... you know ... but I think that just speaks to kind of fears about the inability for people to detach the character your playing from yourself. But in reality obviously that's ... that would be a completely invalid way of looking ... you know, you are playing a character that might on some level reflect you, or it might completely not, you know, it's ... it's not ... it really isn't you. And you shouldn't feel like it should effect you ... in the same way that an actor wouldn't feel that about a character they portray in a film.

PLAYER OF THE STORYTELLER: That's true ... that's true. But I guess with an actor someone else has given you permission by writing the script, but you have to give yourself the permission in the LARP. You're ... you're the director of your own character, and that's why you carry those strange feelings with you ... because it's like ... there's no one to tell you that what you did was right or what you did was wrong. You just have to ... I guess the best feeling you can feel is that you, even if you hated your character, that you're happy with how you played them. That you ... that they were complex, or that they got the chance to ... be tested or yeah ... but you have no one to tell you like you did a good job.

8. PLAYER OF THE HEIR: (09/05/2023)

LARP FACILITATOR: So it's like you had this reaction to Afra's narrative, it obviously connects deeply to your character's narrative. This triggers lots of emotional reactions that you really felt ... in ... fully kind of in character. Yeah. And then the decision not to act, not to express it ... was that ... then that didn't ... you know the fact that it was a very internal experience, do you think that in a way added something for you in a way kind of coming out of it ... that you like really felt something and you didn't even have to ... didn't have perform it.

PLAYER OF THE HEIR: Yeah ... exactly ... like it was exactly that. But it was interesting to ... to feel like and I think that's quite a special environment if you feel like nothing will be lost if you don't give a big performance ... you know nothing will be lost if you just keep this to yourself like it doesn't ... there ... it was kind of this really weird environment where ... the stakes were high somehow, but at the same time there was somehow no pressure to ... at least for me to perform anything or to to be anything or to make it memorable in this weird way that maybe sometimes you would if it's like a big, exciting thing ... you just kind of ... you kind of lean in like into the extreme. But

here you ... you know evaluate the extreme as you would if you were just a person in a therapy group. You know even with big traumatic things sometimes the ... or even the big traumatic thing like stops you from expressing it. It ... you know, it like stops you itself from coming out because it's just difficult to ... it's not, you know the easiest the most natural thing ... is not to have a ... always to have a big breakdown. Sometimes the most natural thing is to like be almost muted by the immensity.

