

Writing dialogue: stance, space, and emotion

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ABSTRACT

Writing dialogue: Stance, space, and emotion is a practice-led research project completed in 2017 at the Victorian College of the Arts. The thesis comprises of the screen play *Dance Drama* and a dissertation.

This dissertation will explore how energy can be valuably conceptualized as residing within a writer's body before becoming dialogue; how dialogue can be imagined within the framework of John W. Du Bois' 'stance triangle', so that its power and subtlety can be developed; and how employing concepts proposed in the paper 'How Emotion Shapes Behavior' can inform characters. The accumulation and interpretation of these concepts aims to inform an imaginative process that places dialogue at the centre of writing a screenplay. The process is modelled to convey the power and utility that dialogue can possess in life, art, and film.

DECLARATION

Writing dialogue: stance, space, and emotion

This is to certify that:

- (i) This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters of Fine Arts (Film and Television)
- (ii) Due acknowledgment has been made in the text of all materials used
- (iii) The thesis is 10700 words in length, exclusive of figures, bibliography and appendices

Mischa Baka

Signed: 

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Introductory story: The imagined film.

When I was 9, my father said to me, "I'm going to see the most boring movie ever made. Would you like to attend with me?" I said, "yes."

He said, "Its very boring, it's about some people who drive out into the desert, they drive for most of the film and nothing happens. They get a flat tire, change it, then keep driving. That's all that happens."

He said, "are you sure you would like to see the film with me? "

I said, "yes."

He said, "OK, but don't blame me if you get bored."

We got to the cinema, and I sat next to my dad, and we watched the previews. And the movie started, and a big Batman symbol filled the screen, with the title 'Batman.'

For a second I was confused, we were in the wrong cinema. The film he described was not Batman. I looked at my dad, he was smiling; obviously, this was his plan, he had tricked me.

Sometimes I think about the unrealized film. The one my dad described, "the most boring film ever made." I expect that trapped in their car without much to do, the characters spent most of their time talking, making conversation. Was it really that boring? What did they talk about and why?

Investigating the question as to why people talk, resulted in the development of a writing process, which went on to inform the writing of the screenplay *Dance Drama*.

Introduction: Dialogue at the centre

The creative work of this dissertation has been to write the feature film screenplay *Dance Drama*. This dissertation offers an account of how a dialogue-centric method was developed to generate the screenplay, and the rationale that underpinned its writing.

Given the intimate link between the research and the creative piece *Dance Drama*, this thesis at times makes use of the first person.

I will begin by framing the pursuit of a dialogue-centric approach to screenwriting as unusual in a field dominated by understanding film predominantly as a visual medium.

Then I will chart how my focus on dialogue has emerged out of a personal interest in yoga, dance, and the laws of thermodynamics. The concept of 'holding a space' a psychological term, devised by D.W. Winnicott is used to further lay the foundations for this creative investigation into dialogue. This will lead to my discovery of stance and 'the stance triangle,' a theoretical framework proposed by John W. Du Bois, used to conceptualize and analyse stance taking in discourse.

I will explain how this framework helped inform processes and rationales by which to generate and craft dialogue. I will describe a particular method I developed, which utilizes audio recording and playback, and can be placed at the center of this thesis and the writing of many scenes in the screenplay *Dance Drama*.

Finally, I will describe the other influences that helped develop *Dance Drama*, in order to present a fuller understanding of the method, by way of seeing it as a holistic process that draws on scientific disciplines, personal interests, and the idiosyncrasies of being an artist and writer.

I. Context: “show, don’t tell”

While film is unquestionably a visual medium, the oft-quoted adage “show, don’t tell” indicates a supposition that dialogue is simply obvious to a large degree, too transparent to require deep study. In a popular online guide for aspiring filmmakers, film critic Whitney Seibold writes that the three words show don’t tell ‘will likely be mentioned on the very first day of any given film class in any given film school worth their weight in Bergman.’¹

Similarly, Alfred Hitchcock dismissed dialogue as mere sound in an interview with François Truffaut, stating that ‘Dialogue should simply be a sound among other sounds, just something that comes out of the mouths of people whose eyes tell the story in visual terms.’²

Historian and film critic Sarah Kozloff identifies a subtle but persistent anti-dialogue bias throughout the industry. In her book *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (2000), she argues that while through the ages playwrights have made wordplay their modus operandi, cinema has demonstrated a certain hostility towards dialogue.³

According to Kozloff, a persistent undervaluing of dialogue has led to a misconception about how films work. How dialogue is held within our imaginations when we think about film has been limited by a prevailing analogy:

¹ Whitney Seibold, "Free Film School #63: Show, Don't Tell, Damn It," (2012), <http://www.craveonline.com.au/site/195281-free-film-school-63-show-dont-tell-damn-it>.

² F. Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (Simon & Schuster, 1985).

³ S. Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (University of California Press, 2000).

We are accustomed to using the analogy that the filmgoer is a voyeur, surreptitiously spying on the actions of the on-screen characters. What we've often overlooked is that viewers are also listeners...listening in on conversations purportedly addressed to others...designed to communicate certain information to the audience.⁴

In this vein, dialogue in film and screenwriting today often appears to be lacking metaphorical resources to help in its generation, examination, and exploration. In the minds of screenwriters and filmmakers, dialogue often presents itself as an obstacle. Australian Director Ben Young recently commented on the postproduction of his first feature, *Hounds of Love* (2017), saying that 'Filmmaking is a visual medium and one of your objectives in editing is to take out as much dialogue as you can.'⁵

Ben Young is clear about using a personal style and approach to his craft, but where do we turn when considering a shift towards dialogue as existing in its own right? Where are we to find new ways of thinking about and generating dialogue for screenwriting and film?

II. Where to now? Finding a guide to writing dialogue

In her book, *Television Dramatic Dialogue* (2010), Kay Richardson identifies dialogue writing as a craft bound by a particular writerly tradition:

There is a traditional belief that holds that writers become good at what they do by practicing craft, building on and developing innate talent, which cannot be taught. In this view, very little of writers' craft knowledge is explicitly formulated. The distinction is one between tacit understanding, *knowing how*, and explicit knowledge, *knowing that*. If this is true, then, there is, for writers, nothing practical to be gained by acquiring explicit understanding of the language they and other writers use in the exercise of their craft. It will not make them any better at what

⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁵ Craig Mathieson, "Hounds of Love: Perth Filmmaker Ben Young Cuts to the Bone to Create a Brutal, Riveting Suburban Thriller " *The Age/ The Sydney Morning Herald* 26/05/2017 2017.

they do, and may make them worse. Such understanding will make them worse writers if it interferes with their writerly instincts, introducing a screen of cognitive-rational discourse in which success depends on keeping rationality in check.⁶

Richardson exposes an underlying suspicion towards overly strategic or analytic dialogue writing. She goes on to define this tradition as coming from the romantic theory of authorship.⁷ If applied to screen writing, a romantic theory of authorship suggests that a screenwriter should not pry open what tends to be working on an instinctual and emotional level. To do so would be to risk its ruin.

Richardson identifies Rib Davis as one writer who does offer a theory uniquely focused on dialogue writing. In his book *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* (2003), Davis draws on extracts from produced screenplays, as well as recordings of real life conversations. 'Selective naturalism' is a term used by Davis and is described thus:

Selective naturalism is the style of writing which attempts to faithfully imitate dialogue as we normally speak it, but, unnoticed, manages to omit all those passages – not only beginnings and endings but also all sorts of other uninteresting sections – which would add nothing to the production. For it is not enough merely to imitate life: scripts are not straight, one-for-one imitations of slabs of life. In selective naturalism they are crafted, molded to appear as if they were.⁸

Davis uses English filmmaker Mike Leigh's films as an example of selective naturalism. Interestingly, the dialogue of Mike Leigh's films provides an aspirational locus in quality and style for my own screenplays. Films such as *Life is Sweet* (1991), *Secrets and Lies* (1996), and *Happy Go Lucky* (2008), offer a type of sophistication in dialogue that appears to take its cues from real life.

Mike Leigh initiates a process with an actor that explores a character's world through improvised dialogue over many months. As described by film academic Mark Poole, the actors and Leigh together find a 'rest point' that each character can

⁶ K. Richardson, *Television Dramatic Dialogue: A Sociolinguistic Study* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 64. (original emphasis)

⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸ R. Davis, *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 50.

inhabit.¹⁰ Leigh then introduces the characters to one another, and their 'rest points' come together, inevitably bringing about dramatic possibilities in how they differ or converge. These possibilities are recorded and go on to influence the production of the final script. It is a process that is structured and formulaic, but allows space for the nuances of dialogue to develop, and the qualities of improvisation to manifest. The story of Leigh's screenplay is often left open to the possibilities that arise in Leigh's process. An ending is often developed in the final stages, during another round of improvisation.

Although my process differs to Leigh's, it does at times employ a performative aspect in order to find a naturalistic style. As will be explored below, this performative process allows space for instinctive language skills to manifest. Selective naturalism is what my dialogue aspires to.

III. Explorations into a method

This thesis borrows from the fields of linguistics and psychology in order to establish a methodological framework. It attempts to do this in the face of a history and ideology that has traditionally focused on the visual qualities of film. It seeks to provide metaphors and imaginative spaces that will further dialogue as a generative force in screenwriting. It attempts to give more shape to the craft left neglected by prevailing methodologies.

In her contribution to *Dialogue across Media (2017)*, Kay Richardson identifies the concept of 'stance' as a useful lens through which to understand a character's identity during the writing process.¹¹ In the field of linguistics, the concept of stance provides an interpretive framework. It is used to understand how speakers position themselves in regards to intentionality, evaluation, and understanding in social relations.

¹⁰ Mark Poole to Mark Poole screenwriter and director 2004, <http://www.markpoole.com.au/>.

¹¹ Richardson, 5.

Dialogue is first and foremost interactive. When crafting authentic dialogue the writer could see it as a link in a chain, reflecting the flow and relative fluency of conversation, with its basic addressing and answering form. Although essentially momentary and fleeting, in its cumulative effects over time, dialogue carries much of the expressive power of character – through the words spoken and their manner of delivery, including bodily gesture. Dialogue also carries a lot of extra information about context and plot. Within this flux of identities and information, the concept of 'stance' proves invaluable in its analytical ability to hold a steady focus on moving entities. 'Stance' as utilized in the writing of *Dance Drama* takes a practical step beyond just the analytical, to inform an imaginative process that can generate pages of first draft dialogue and craft them towards a finished screenplay.

While a single instance of stance could be considered the smallest unit of character expression, Richardson details how a character's overall identity can be seen as the cumulative expression of ongoing stances. Deviations in stance generate audience speculation in regard to a character that has been created and sustained. Stance can thereby be minutely yet powerfully operative in propelling the drama, as a character must negotiate stance from one scene to the next. For a character to be 'comprehensible, plausible and interesting... the optic of stance'¹² can be an indispensable tool in the writing of dialogue.

Taking Richardson's cue, I will endeavor to strengthen this line between screen writing and the notion of stance. I will do this by introducing the model of the 'stance triangle' as proposed by the linguist John W. Du Bois.¹³

Being inspired and informed by other disciplines has often been a part of how I work as a screenwriter and artist. So before venturing into the theory and application of the stance triangle, I will share some experiential details on this journey so far.

¹² J. Mildorf and B. Thomas, *Dialogue across Media* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017).

¹³ John W Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle," *Stancetaking in discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction* 164 (2007).

Part One: Personal context and recent works - conversation, dance, and the laws of thermodynamics

I. An origin story for dialogue

The boundaries between my personal philosophies and the main character of Jean in *Dance Drama* often felt blurred in the process of writing. This blurring was essential in allowing the body and mind to wholly commit to generating her dialogue.

While writing *Dance Drama*, an origin story formed. A story that imagines the origin of dialogue from a place inside the flesh, ruminating in the gut, the heart, limbs, and then the mind, before tumbling out into the air or onto the page. What is this mysterious place from which dialogue originates? Which processes does it rely on?

A captivating science class as a child explained the process of energy transformation in the form of a fire, and began to lay the foundations of an origin story. The potential energy of wood is being released as heat, light, and smoke, in a continuous chain reaction. Fire captivates with its flickering heart of transient energy. Many have watched a fire burning, lost in its dance of energy transfer. Brian Cox, English physicist, and professor of particle physics, explores this process in his documentary *Wonders of Life* (2013). In the first episode, 'What is life?' Brian Cox describes The First Law of Thermodynamics; the fact that energy is neither created nor destroyed, and that energy is eternal.

The story of the evolution of the universe is the story of the transformation of energy from one form to another. From the origin of

the first galaxies to the ignition of the first stars to the formation of the first planets.¹⁴

He goes on to describe life, conceptualising organisms and humans as battery-like creatures that transfer energy from one state to another. As such, the story has continued from the formation of planets to the formation of human beings as creatures of energy transfer.

The body needs energy to express itself. The body is a space that facilitates the transformation of energy into movement, heat, and thought. It requires a source of fuel and needs the right conditions to transform its energy. The human body must cultivate these conditions. When the conditions are right, the energy may be transformed and purposefully directed. These processes of energy transfer as it unfolds informs an origin for dialogue. This understanding comes from the belief that humans, to some degree, can mediate, manipulate, and transform energy in a mindful and directed way. Through representing the drama of energy transfer as a human process, an audience can become more aware of the power humans have as creatures to determine their futures, individually and collectively.

I propose that storytelling in conversation and dance are activities that help an artist manifest energy into the world. Creating awareness of the body and holding the space that is the body is often the challenge of being an artist and a human. The screenplay *Dance Drama* illuminates this challenge. The central character of Jean strives to maintain the space that is her body, in the classroom and in the world, so that she may discover creative expression through dance and inspire others to do the same.

I am partners in a small business with yoga teacher Paula Lay. We record yoga videos and share them via YouTube.¹⁵ In my experience practicing yoga and dance

¹⁴ Brian Cox, "What Is Life?," in *Wonders of Life* (Australia BBC).

¹⁵ Mischa Baka, "Paula Lay Yoga," <http://paulalayyoga.com/>.

keeps the body available and sensitive to reading and expressing energy in creative and transformative ways. This experience is indicative of a great history of Yoga practice that has developed peoples relationship with their body, mind, energy and explored enlightenment.¹⁶ The videos from our YouTube channel transmit movement into the bodies of people all over the world. The videos help people maintain and hold the space of their bodies so that they are sensitive and able.

Every day the business generates dialogue through both email and YouTube Comments. These portals inform and facilitate a space for the body to move and work with energy. This can be seen in the following exchange (taken from the public YouTube Comments between Monica and Paula) :

It's as if there isn't enough room between me and the floor to get my leg through and feels very awkward- sometimes I have to use the arm on that side to help the leg through. Is there anything I can do?

Hi Monica... This is a common issue, firstly, you can drop down onto 1 knee and then step the other leg forward - this is level 1. When you want to try the full variation again, think about bringing the knee to the chest and shift the weight forward onto your hands whilst also lifting your hips up high, to make space to step the foot forward.¹⁷

My dance film, *Always, So Suddenly, All The Time* (2015)¹⁸ similarly explores physical manifestations of energy as it moves between the bodies of four women. These women represent energy moving between bodies and across generations, as gestures and actions ripple, bounce, and flow amongst them. The space they inhabit allows that energy to flow and manifest in choreographic spasms and poses. The pleasure I personally receive while watching this film arises in anticipation, observing the action/reaction, watching it as a tangible feeling, and experiencing how the process happens.

¹⁶ D.G. White, *Yoga in Practice* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Youtube, "Yoginimelbourne " <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUK-gz5bmmjn2W2tJRJWeew>; Baka; Youtube; *ibid*.

¹⁸ <http://mischabaka.com/portfolio/always-so-suddenly-all-the-time/> Mischa Baka, "Always, So Suddenly, All the Time.," (Underbelly Arts Festival 2015 Cockatoo Island 2015).

Dance Drama continues to explore the power of dialogue to direct, transform, and use energy in unique and constructive ways. Writing Jean's dialogue as she spoke to her students in the dance club, I walked around the room, danced, moved, and felt the dialogue rise from the gut, the heart, and into the mind. I felt a fire burning:

JEAN

...Even our mind can let go of the business of day to day thought. And perhaps we view our thoughts, as if they are little soft clouds floating across the sky of the mind. And let them be. Now be more aware perhaps of the blue sky of the higher mind. We can allow that space of the mind to be so open and free and uncluttered that insights emerge. We can allow the gut, the intuitive sense of self, to be open free and available. So we can deeply plug in to our intuition, to our impulses.¹⁹

As a writer, I believe that dialogue is energy that can be embodied. The body, as much as the mind, must work to manage and express itself. How does energy flow through the body and transform into movement and dialogue? Can the writer's own body take on and inform that process? I set about to explore these questions while writing *Dance Drama*, so that any methodology that resulted would be informed by a "theory of body" as much as a "theory of mind." In this endeavour, from the field of psychology, the notion of space as something that must be physically and psychologically "held" has been instrumental.

II. Psychological reflections and considerations of space

Story: The forever falling doll

¹⁹ *Dance Drama* (2017), Scene 64.

An auntie once recounted a childhood game she oversaw on the beach; my cousin Venice would throw her doll over the edge of a large rock. At the base of the rock, my cousin Violet would be in place to catch the doll. Having caught the doll, Violet would quickly climb the rock herself and throw the doll over the edge, by which time Venice would have climbed down and be in place to catch the doll. My auntie remembered the game for its tendency to go on and on without end. One girl would replace the other and the doll was forever falling and being caught; the girls continuing to explore the drama of forsaking the doll and saving it, teasing out its emotional nuances and testing their physical limits. It was a game with no end. Its objective was to hold a cycle of energy and drama in a continuous loop. Each player became complicit in holding the space and allowing it to continue.

Many of our childhood games had this quality of holding a space. The space could be nothing more than a patch of beach sand with a wall built around it. The ocean waves would slide up over the beach and crash into our sand wall, tearing it down. From within the wall we would pile on more sand and rebuild, in an endless cycle of destruction and construction. There was no end to the game. It was only ever abandoned to be resumed on another day.

III. Holding a space

The notion of 'holding a space' is central to my own ideals and beliefs as an artist and creative collaborator. As a psychological term, devised by D.W. Winnicott in the 1930s, holding referred to not only the physical act of holding a baby, but to the psychological equivalent of maintaining 'transitional space'.²⁰ Transitional space is where the child learns to draw links between the outer world of reality and the inner world of bodily sensations and cognitive mechanisms. Over time, it allows for the slow embodiment of a cohesive self. There is an integration of mental life and

²⁰ D. Winnicott, *Winnicott on the Child* (Da Capo Press, 2009).

embodied experience.

Transitional space is where the child learns to play, drawing upon the imagination to shape experience into meaning. Through the mediating parental figure, who does not need to know exactly what is going on within the child but provides reliable containment for it, the fluidity of the child's experiences can reach verbal expression in communicative language. In cases where holding was insufficient, Winnicott identified a disconnection between events and meaning, i.e. experience remains unnamed, unrecognized, and seemingly insignificant or denied. Winnicott himself asserted that this adequate/inadequate developmental process (once established) is not limited to infancy, but continues over our lifetimes, particularly called upon during moments of change, growth, and learning. A "good enough" sense of being held allows a coherent sense of self to be maintained. The accumulation of these experiences becomes a pattern, establishing a still point that opens a perspective on the world.²¹

Within *Dance Drama*, transitional space is central to my character Jean's approach to teaching dance/drama. It forms part of the thematic concerns of the screenplay as a whole, and is explicitly discussed by characters, as seen in the following extract:

TONY
Can I just, sort of, hold the
conversation. Um, this is Leah's
notion, and I'm borrowing it, Leah?
Where did it come from, that notion
of a holding space?

LEAH
Winnicott.

TONY
Winnicott, the, the...
developmental psychologist, if I'm
right?

LEAH

²¹ Ibid.

Yeah.

TONY

So, what we need to do is hold all this conversation inside our heads, close to our hearts, for the next few moments, just let all this stuff circulate around in your head, um, think about it, don't think about it, be conscious, be unconscious about it, don't speak, don't be overly concerned with the language of it. Because I think what we have now started to do, is to get bogged down in the language. Where is, we want to move back into the practical ideas.

OLGA

Yeah... can I just say...

TONY

Could you now, now that Jean's here, just by yourself, from this conversation, let's not write five, we probably don't have time to do that, but just write one crazy idea that might take us forward to tomorrow, the next day, the week. To thinking about how we might solve this problem.

JEAN

This is fucked up.²²

In this scene the character Tony explicitly attempts to hold a space and solve the problem of Jeans class Trip to Europe being canceled. This can be viewed as a scene where the space and who holds it is being contested. Upset, Jean dismisses Tony's attempt at holding the space and rudely departs the meeting. With this departure, Jean is claiming Winocotte for herself, indicating that Tony is 'inadequate' at holding a space, and that this is still her domain.

Later in scene 66 we see Jean successfully holding a space for Chris to tell and

²² Baka, *Dance Drama*, Scene 53.

intimate story about his past, a form of self expression that marks development in his ability to reflect on his life and actions. He speaks of an event between himself, his father and a woman, indicating insight into the events problems. Jean partly holds this space for Chris by modeling the process prior in scene 65, telling her own story and reflecting on its meaning.

Transitional space is a pervasive concept in theme, application, and ideology within my work and life. It feeds into the notion of drama being a process of energy transformation. Transitional space could be considered an ideal space in which energy transformation can take place. This space can be both physical and psychological. It can be entered into and purposefully maintained, using techniques that draw upon the resources of both body and mind. This space can be powerful and transformative, but like any physical space, it can be possessively controlled and fiercely guarded.

Part Two: Generating dialogue: stance and the stance triangle; a framework for understanding dialogue

Story: Animals discover words

The election of Paul Keating as Australian Prime Minister in 1991 revolutionized a childhood game. My two cousins, neighbour, and brother had spent a lot of time being rabbits and making burrows, but that year each rabbit was expected to run for Prime Minister. A plentiful currency of gumnuts was replaced by a finite supply of monopoly money that didn't grow on trees. The casino and its various card games acquired a tax. The rabbits forgot that they were rabbits altogether. Policy speeches became central. The rabbits became speechmakers and debaters, determined to win the next election. Dialogue took a central place in how we shaped and engaged within the world we were creating, in how we held the space.

As politicians, we were taking a stance on various issues, ideas, and people. We were projecting that stance into the world with dialogue. Our stances were not always explicit, but were often inferred, hinted, and assumed, just like with real politicians.

I. Stance: the flux of relatedness

John W. Du Bois, a professor of linguistics, explores the phenomenon of 'stance' with attention to its social value and purpose during conversational interaction. His article 'Stance Taking in Discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction,'²³ uncovers a complex web of interconnections, in which specific points of convergence work to support a framework of focus. As such, these points allow for the shifting play of conversation to be analyzed, overall dialogic possibilities to be identified, and ultimately, creatively utilized.

Du Bois devised an analytical method in which he mapped utterances within particular conversational exchanges. He found that a gradually building configuration of 'stance pairs' occurs within a conversation. This is characterized by the words of one speaker, being to some degree echoed by a subsequent speaker, as they are carried forward into the exchange. Furthermore, beneath the surface play of this exchange, exists a largely invisible 'community of discourse.' Du Bois considers this community of discourse as the wider acknowledgement of words that have been spoken before, i.e. the social and cultural context of the current exchange. From this perspective, stance always carries an element of sociocultural values. Under close analysis, Du Bois asserts that "We begin to appreciate why stance should come to wield both subtlety and power in the dynamics of social life."²⁴ Stance pairing allows the evaluative aspect of stance to be identified and followed.

²³ R. Englebretson, *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction, Pragmatics & Beyond* (John Benjamins Pub., 2007).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

The diagraph is an interpretative tool that becomes useful in tracking inter-subjectivity. It lays bare the similarities and contrasts between stances within a dialogue. By mapping utterances across columns of resonance, elements that resonate with each other align vertically. When two people are in agreement with each other, it appears that both stances are equivalent. The diagraph however, identifies subtle differences in which the alignment or misalignment of stances becomes visible. Two stances are rarely totally convergent or divergent, and can often remain ambiguous. As Du Bois states, alignment is continually variable.²⁵ The diagraph allows for such variability to be seen.

(48)	1	ALICE:	I do n't know if she 'd do it .
	3	MARY:	I do n't know if she would either.

Figure 1: Mapping utterances²⁶

Resonance is most obviously observed in the reproduction of the words and the language structures of the previous speaker. Furthermore, the diagraph identifies particular conversational conventions, such as 'either' or 'too', that function as inter-subjective 'alignment markers.' For example; "I liked it too". Such markers are so woven into our speech patterns that to leave them out becomes a marker in itself.

II. Contextualization of stance

While the different types of stance are numerically great, for example: evaluative (that's horrible), aligning (I agree), affective (I'm glad), it is the contextualization of stance that allows for a useful tracking of its emergence and its interpretation within an inter-subjective arena.

Stance is always more than words and their connotations. Du Bois writes

²⁵ Du Bois.

²⁶ "The diagraph is designed to represent the mapping of structured resonances across utterances." Englebretson, 160.

'Contextualization cues (or indexical signs) work by pointing beyond the utterance to its presupposed conditions of use.'²⁷ Three basic questions are proposed for the process of interpreting stance. These questions provide the foundations of an initial interpretative framework that seeks to go beyond the explicit words of the stance and provide context. They can be equally useful in a simple direct utterance, or in a stance that is distributed across multiple utterances. Du Bois states that only when context is taken into account can stance be considered complete; demonstrating that stance always has others in mind.

Who is the stance taker? This questions draws upon biographical associations, co-participants present, previous utterances, voice quality, and details such as gender, ethnicity, and ownership of the claims made.

What is the object of stance? Often a conversation will provide direct referential grounding, but the object can also be inherent within ongoing dialogue and not referred to at all.

What is the stance taker responding to? This question looks at the sequential shape of dialogue, i.e. what aligns this stance with its surrounds in terms of meaning, timing, and mode.

Subject/ object vectors prompt the issue of inter-subjectivity. When two participants collide in an exchange, we can begin to see how they react to each other. This enables a new level of understanding within the logic of stance interpretation. A shared object has become a 'cornerstone of the dialogic construction of inter-subjectivity.'²⁸

In keeping with the three basic questions above, stance can be said to evaluate an object, position a subject, and align with other subjects. However, in daily life, stance is a unified act according to Du Bois, and it is the 'stance triangle' that

²⁷ Ibid., 146. Same again

²⁸ Du Bois.

enables this unity to remain intact during analysis. In the stance triangle, the object and subject nodes of the triangle remain as described above, whereas the third node is conceptualized as the second subject: the other. The stance triangle is appealing to me in its capacity to be visualized as moving energy.

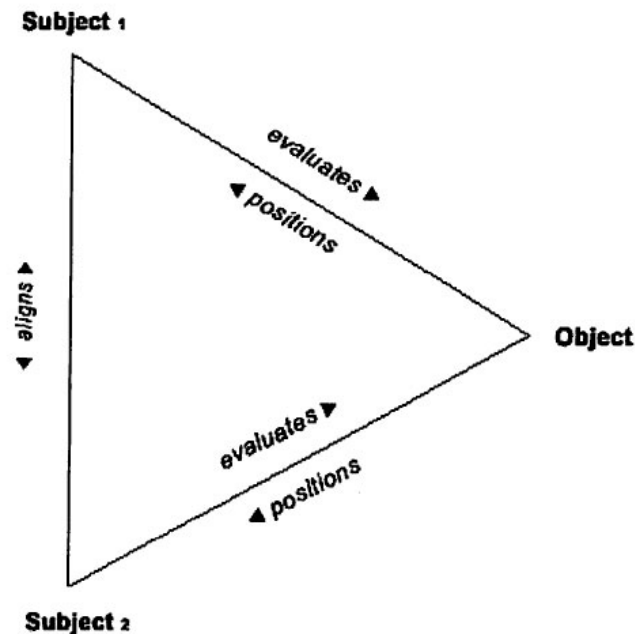


Figure 2: The stance triangle as illustrated by Du Bios.²⁹

The triangle holds a space between its three points and suggests that the collective energy of its participants, its subjects, can be held in that space. This energy can be imagined as a three dimensional amorphous form that represents inter-subjectivity. One can imagine such a form shifting, stretching, and transforming over time, as dialogue searches out and negotiates each subject's association with each point.

It is important to note that this graphical representation is different to many of the diagrams that are offered by screenwriting manuals, where time appears as the constant over which a line can be drawn, charting a climax or low point (see Figure 3 below). When this traditional graphic is applied to a scene or a film as a whole, we sense a forward trajectory with inclines and declines, much like a mountain range. We also see the challenges it offers to a mountain climber, perhaps the hero.

²⁹ Englebretson, 163.

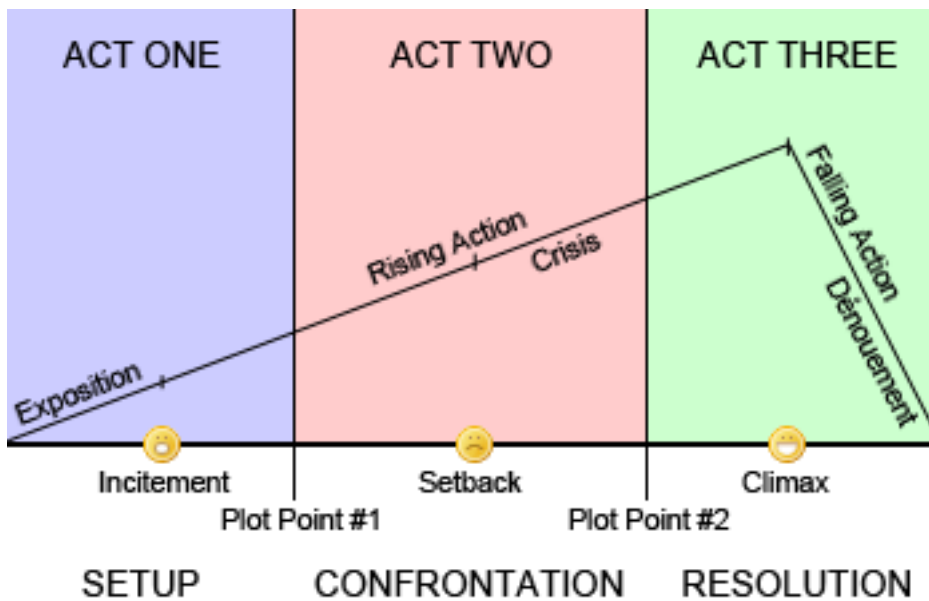


Figure 3: Traditional Graphic for charting a film's trajectory: three act structure.³⁰

Neither conceptualisation should replace the other, and indeed they do not offer immediate variables to parallel. For writers, however, the stance triangle inspires the imagination differently. The graphic of the stance triangle offers a space that is not being traversed over time, but rather one that is being held within time. The holding of this space echoes the above interpretation of Winnicott and his transitional space, where words and dialogue enter into an arena of possibility. Stance is asserted by a character. It is clear but fluid and ready to be shifted, shaped, and nudged.

To take it a step further, being held may require each of the three points to provide enough tension or slack to suspend something before it falls over, rendering one of the points useless or inert. At such a point, relatedness falls away.

In this conceptualisation, the stance triangle is what is being held. It is an amorphous form – reaching, twisting, inquisitive, and/or playful. It facilitates inter-subjectivity and gives rise to dialogue. It is a space in which the possibility of how

³⁰ TV Tropes Wiki, "Three Act Structure", ed. threeactstructure_9683-1 (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ThreeActStructure>: Wiki group 2017).

one exists, behaves, and operates is being negotiated.

How does this conceptualisation apply to the characters in my screenplay and how I imagined them? I do not imagine mountain-like obstacles that my characters are trying to overcome on their trajectory towards a goal. I imagine the space that they try to hold around them, in their lives, and between themselves, other people, objects, and ideas. This space is inherently dramatic as they actively try to maintain it, shape it, and extend themselves within it. Each engagement with stance by a character pushes out the edges of the space, keeping it intact and opening up its possibilities as others respond or react.

In the screenplay *Dance Drama*, the sense of holding a space is most explicit and literal in the character of Jean. Her dance club aligns with her suggestions that each participant take on a stance of openness and expressiveness towards each other using dance.

Outside of the dance club, the space that Jean works so hard to create becomes harder to negotiate in a more complex world. This informs the drama, as we see the processes of stance-taking manifest in subtler, more searching, and more complicated ways.

In scene 15 of *Dance Drama*, Jean and Randa have dinner with Lauren, providing an example of stance at play. The scene opens with Randa revealing how excited she is to be selected by Jean to attend a prestigious dance festival. In this scene, it becomes apparent through Randa's excited emotional investment that she is well aligned with Jean's stance on where to find self worth within the world. The "object" in the stance triangle is self worth, and Randa has a newfound alignment with Jean in believing her own self worth can come from dancing at a prestigious festival. Lauren is compelled to throw a spanner in the works, even if under the guise of humour:

LAUREN

Don't you have a boy friend at school? Won't he miss you?³¹

The conversation continues and becomes good humoured yet antagonistic. Lauren inquires as to whether or not Randa is part of the "cool group" at school. The scene concludes with Lauren reflecting on her time kissing as a schoolgirl. Lauren's conversational inquiry as to her daughter's popularity at school and her fun story about kissing boys are subtextually being placed in opposition to Jean's stance on self worth. Lauren is asserting a belief that Randa is looking in the wrong place with Jean; a distant international festival. The pleasure I find in this this scene is a sense that alignment between the subjects (the characters) and the object of 'self worth' is at times ambiguous or questionable. Does Lauren really think that it is better to find respect in being a good kisser, or is she simply finding an engaging way to oppose Jean's stance on self worth? Perhaps even more interestingly, subconsciously or unwittingly, Lauren has revealed a link between her own self worth and being popular with men.

I imagine that in this scene, if Lauren were confronted with a simple question, "Do you define your self worth in relation to how much a man desires you?" she would explicitly deny any such suggestion. However, within the dynamics of negotiating stance with dialogue, Lauren has striven to maintain a space, where her daughter is aligned with her, and she is valued and desired. She has unwittingly resorted to using the dynamics within her own life as material to negotiate and define this space. Vulnerability and defensiveness are exposed side by side.

Similarly, Jean has strived to maintain a space where Randa is aligned with her stance. She is valued for her projects and ideals, but at the same time, she apparently has no boyfriend of her own.

In each instance, both women have revealed a contrasting stance of where they find

³¹ Baka, *Dance Drama*, Scene 15.

value. The scene ends with the telling words embedded in each of their final utterances: Lauren 'kissing' and Jean 'dance.' They each compete to have Randa align with their stance on self worth, while at the same time unveil subtle undercurrents of doubt.

The stance triangle provides a framework for the study of dialogic interactions. In *Dance Drama*, these interactions are clarified by determining the stance acts of evaluating (object), positioning (subject), and aligning (inter-subjectivity), and by using the apparatus of the stance triangle to elucidate a complex array of family relatedness.

While the smallest unit of stance is the individual stance, part of its significance derives from its juxtaposition with other stance utterances, including its resonance with prior stances (as seen above in Figure 1). Thus the shape of social interaction can be fruitfully analysed, even as it comes into being in its ever-shifting games of to and fro, of aligning and/or diverging in minute gradations.

Randa returns to questions about self worth in scene 55. She anxiously asks why she was paired with Chris as a dance partner. She wants to know if she is ugly, and if her ugliness was considered by Jean as an antidote to inappropriate sexual advances by Chris. Randa wants to know if by rejecting her mother's stance and embracing Jean's, she has limited her own potential to wield any power in being beautiful and attractive.

The possibilities inherent in Jean's stance suddenly look to be limited, the space constricting. Randa's inner thoughts may run something like this: "Am I ugly? Am I capable of being loved? Can I be beautiful? Can I be my mother's daughter, after all?"

All these questions contend with Randa's place as a subject within a stance triangle, as she grapples with her alignment with Jean, her mother, and the object of self

worth. The shifting energy as imagined in the stance triangle is in flux, as it redefines Randa's sense of possibility and sense of self. The questions have arisen over time, just as Randa's perception and navigation of this stance have developed from scene to scene, moment-to-moment, contrasting, juxtaposing, and evolving.

Du Bois' method proves to be a useful tool in holding momentarily still the multitudinous complexity of dialogic composition. It allows the flux of relatedness to be negotiated or even directed, ever so slightly but with consequential effect, in the crafting of dialogue.

Du Bois enquires about the larger consequences of stance. In keeping with his triangular focus, he proposes an answer that encompasses three key aspects that tie an individual into the larger social sphere, namely action, responsibility, and value.³² Just as stance is necessarily influenced by others, the *act in itself* also generates a field of influence. The "serious business" of responsibility involves ownership of the act. It is remembered over time, and unless counteracted, becomes inscribed into the social landscape of the community. Finally, sociocultural *values* are shaped and perpetuated by the actors that participate in their enactment. This is the cultural fabric in which we are enmeshed, shaping our identities and abilities, our languages and histories. It is the cultural capital upon which we depend – one that we can either ignorantly squander or caringly and purposefully engage with.

III. Generating dialogue, a practical method

The rules of syntax as defined by Du Bois can be useful in shaping and refining dialogue, but it would be too cumbersome to consciously employ these rules to generate dialogue line by line. When generating dialogue, I find it is best to leave these rules where they have always been in everyday life, threshed out and called

³² Englebretson, 163.

forth seemingly without conscious thought. Instead, the broader parameters of stance can be consciously defined and invented by the screenwriter, so that words, sentences, and phrases are left to tumble out as they would in reality.

As discussed earlier, the stance triangle offers one such way to define these broader parameters while writing dialogue. It does so by consciously identifying the object of a stance and the social actors that are implicated. These parameters can be kept in mind while generating dialogue and help guide its creation. But is keeping these parameters in mind enough for praxis to manifest ?

As a screenwriter part of my creative exploration has been to *live* within these parameters and *feel* how they coax my mind into generating dialogue. I want to be able to experience the framework as set by the broader parameters of stance in the same way an actor might. I want to live and act in the space that is being held, rather than observe it from a distant, intellectual place.

This desire compelled me to speak as my characters and record the dialogue as a sound file. In the opening scene of *Dance Drama*, Lauren rants about her husband. Her husband is the object in this dialogue, and her stance could be described as displeased:

LAUREN

I do not have to tell him why or
why not I will not be meeting him
for organizational meetings. Which
was to organize his life! Not mine.
I do not have to talk to him at the
door.
Or the car.
I do not have to let him know how
the ankle stuff in my life is
going.
I do not have to comment on whether
it's a nice thing that he's having
lunch at the bay view.³³

³³ Baka, *Dance Drama*, Scene 1.

The rant is by definition an emotional tirade. Its length allowed me to fall into the emotional space of the character and embody the emotions as my own.

IV. Experimental recordings

After recording various emotional rants, I started to leave gaps in the dialogue for another character to respond. I was recording a one sided conversation. Then I recorded another audio layer and filled in the gaps with the other side of the conversation.

This process generated some ridiculous and funny results. My inability to remember exactly where the gaps were, or the details of the other side of the conversation, resulted in numerous interruptions, misunderstandings, and illogical interactions. On the other hand, the process also produced some fruitful outcomes. The first side of the conversation allowed me to fall into the emotional state of the character, without having to think in depth about how someone would respond. This made it easier to inhabit the character's world fully, and ruminate on their stance in a way that felt real.

Having one side of the conversation recorded determined its beginning, middle, and end. Filling in the other side of the conversation motivated a performative energy, where one needed to make views and opinions with immediacy and in the limited spaces provided. The conversation became a battle in thinking quickly enough to get a word in, and forming an opinion on the stance object before the space was closed. In this way, syntax, reasoning, and persuasion drew upon the subconscious mind as it would in everyday conversation. I was avoiding the slow, thoughtful process that a screenwriter uses to craft lines of dialogue. I seemed to be bypassing intentional thought altogether and just reacting.

It is also worth noting that this technique need not only inform heated dialogue. A conversation could be slow and thoughtful and still inspire this performative energy.

A conversation that is slow in nature still requires immediacy in thought. Time is being used to go deeper, to draw from a deeper well.

By no means did this experimental process offer nicely constructed scenes of dialogue. What it offered was “found moments.” These moments could be transcribed, crafted, and shaped into scenes with some of their spontaneity, urgency, dynamism, and conversational syntax intact.

Lastly, this process also appeared to take on qualities of realistic conversation by nature of its construction. The unavoidable interruptions, half-formed ideas, and seemingly unresponsive nature of a character’s dialogue reflected the way that people very often do not listen to each other, interrupt each other, and repeat themselves in conversation. Indeed, moments of resonance and alignment in conversation can often be the hard won reward after navigating disagreement, obstinacy, opinion, and confusion.

Part Three: Character development - Lauren and Jean

I. How emotion shapes behaviour

The character of Lauren is often caught up in emotional rants. Her dialogue could simply be seeking an emotional release; allowing her emotions and feelings to spill out and dissipate into the air and onto the people around her. This is in part what is happening. But as a screenwriter, I want to understand dialogue as more than an emotional release. Lauren is not just wailing or singing emotional energy; she is saying things, she is taking a stance and throwing it into a conversational arena.

The more I embodied Lauren’s character, the more I felt she was inhabiting and exercising frustrated and anxious emotions in an attempt to search out and find answers. She wants things in her life to change, but she does not know how or what

to change. As a result, she dwells in an emotional state that fuels a cognitive, and by extension, dialogical search. She has cast her husband out of her life in an effort to bolster this quest.

By no means is Lauren's behaviour in this quest noble. She projects her frustration onto the people around her and makes demands. Her quest for answers is subconscious in many respects, more so than for Jean, who has established a practice of revelatory dance that provides an avenue of discovery. Lauren has her art, but in contrast to Jean, Lauren's art appears to be failing even more at providing her with answers. This becomes painfully apparent in scene 59:

JEAN

I am telling you. I mean, at first, I thought we were saying it over and over as a way of searching for a new idea, or figure something out. Something new you were trying to articulate about the show. And your work in relation to the show.

LAUREN

I was searching, I didn't have a plan for the conversation.

JEAN

But then it didn't move on. It's like you just wanted this emotional response from me, yes, your work is better than all the other work in the gallery, but I can only say it so many times.³⁴

This scene opens with Lauren already in a state of tears, and Jean recounting the conversation in order to assess how they had gotten into this distraught place. In this exchange, Lauren's searching and yearning comes to a head, and Jean becomes frustrated because no outcome is acceptable for Lauren. As answers fail to materialize and thereby carry the sisters forward, they fall back on an assumption: Lauren simply seeks emotional soothing and reassurance.

³⁴ Ibid., Scene 59.

Perhaps this is Lauren's fatal flaw. She is subconsciously searching for new ways of thinking and understanding her life and its problems, but as those new ways fail to materialize, the emotional weight swallows her up. Under this emotional pressure, Lauren defaults to some quick emotional repair in the form of compliments. Jean admonishes her sister for failing to search and find answers, even though she herself was searching for them, and feels the emotional weight that search entails. They are both failing to resolve any problems. Jean and Lauren's search for a "what if" comes into direct conflict with their pressing and immediate emotional needs.

II. The character of Jean

The character of Jean works every day to maintain her sense of self amongst people and various spaces. She has rituals for the body and mind that mediate energy and allow her to carry on being her ideal creative self; a space that promotes acceptance, sensitivity, connectedness, self-expression, and discovery. It is a space inspired by and informed by Winnicott's theory of transitional space. Jean is promoting and cultivating a capacity for change and growth in her students, perhaps also seeking the same for herself. But why is Jean so unlikable at times?

The space she strives to maintain comes with conditions. It relies on the cooperation of other people, and ironically, her space of inclusiveness requires protective barriers. How those barriers are protected and defended also forms part of her character. She can be stubborn, superior, mean, and rude.

Jean's capacity to maintain and defend her space is limited and human. Her inner calm and peace sometimes require her to zone out and cut off from the rest of the world, preserving her will power. She will walk away from a meeting or ignore a fight. She will not explain or inform, but will choose to save her energy, to maintain her equilibrium, reserving her true self for a select few.

When trying to understand her dismissive behaviour, we can posit that Jean has taken on a form of radical wellbeing. She understands the world as being a hostile and ill-informed place, which can only be survived by taking on an extreme dedication to preserving one's own health and ideology above all else.

The emotional dynamics of *Dance Drama* have been informed by the paper 'How Emotion Shapes Behavior: Feedback, Anticipation, and Reflection, Rather Than Direct Causation'.³⁵

The authors of this study promote emotion as a feedback system: emotional experiences stimulate cognitive processes, which then feed back into behavior, as particular emotions are anticipated or pursued. In order to explicate the subtleties of their theory, emotion is divided into two levels: automatic affect and conscious emotion. Automatic affect is quick (often fractions of a second) and simple, often consisting of a feeling that something is wanted or unwanted. Conscious emotions are comparatively slower and include physiological arousal. They are a lot more complex as they spread through the mind and body. For example, humans flee from tigers (automatic affect) without thinking, but experience the full effects of fear (conscious emotion) only after they have reached safety.

The authors argue that because of the behavioural focus that has typified much in the field of psychology, the inner experience has often been neglected in favour of the simple direct link view that inner emotion causes outer behaviour. This simplification occurs despite the seeming confusion that maladaptive or self-defeating behavior brings into the picture.

According to 'How Emotion Shapes Behavior', emotion as a feedback system explains how a 'crucial bank of programming' is constantly revised, refined, and

³⁵ Roy F. Baumeister et al., "How Emotion Shapes Behavior: Feedback, Anticipation, and Reflection, Rather Than Direct Causation," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 11, no. 2 (2007).

replenished by our daily emotional experiences.³⁶ Emotional regulation is linked to social functioning, and it is not always aimed at feeling better. Cognitive processes can explore the implications and consider the “what ifs” according to a particular or presenting situation. In the end, behaviour is about much more than the elusive quest to feel good.

The feedback system suggests that it is the anticipation of particular emotions that guides behaviour. Anticipated emotion can become more important than the actual felt emotion. Anticipated emotions may be visualized as tracks that emerge according to prior experience, they help us get to where we wish to be. Cognitive mechanisms allow us to adjust or revise behaviour in the light of reasoning or other available information. A twinge of anticipatory guilt, for example, may steer one away from inflicting damage, while the anticipation of pleasure may prompt another to reach for sweets. In these simple examples, it is the avoidance of and the desire for a particular emotion that causes behaviour.

Overall, this system is adaptive in the evolutionary sense, and improves human wellbeing and survival in the long term. It gives humans the capacity to learn from experience and to make decisions amid the opportunities and constraints of a situation. Even the distress caused by failure can generate self-awareness and fortitude, if retrospection is encouraged and a steady mood maintained.

All theories of emotion must grapple with self-destructive emotions, or as Freud put it, morbidity and its intractable ‘compulsion to repeat.’³⁷ In some sense, it is psychology’s initial *raison d’être*. According to the feedback system as described in ‘How Emotion Shapes Behavior,’ the more intense an emotion, the harder the feedback loop works, but only up to a certain point. If the intensity moves distress to the point of distraught for example, the feedback loop is compromised.³⁸ Our emotional repertoire with all of its learning and adjustment abilities will suffer. In

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁷ J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (Karnac Books, 1988).

³⁸ Baumeister et al.

such instances, disruptive symptoms may be triggered. If there is no foreseeable chance of a remedy, distress can prompt a desire for intoxicating escape.

Indeed, it is after these emotionally charged scenes that Lauren gives in to her previous life, returning to her husband, smoking, and drinking on the couch. She abandons her attempt to challenge her life and find answers for its problems.

According to 'How Emotion Shapes Behavior', after an emotional event, people experience 'mood congruent thoughts',³⁹ which may account for the notion that emotion breeds irrationality. Attention is narrowed because the more vivid or impactful features of the event become foregrounded, and we may become briefly fixated. Yet, at the same time this heightened sensitivity also facilitates learning and gives motivational kick to a learned pattern or rule. Similarly, while self-focused attention is thought to intensify depression and anxiety, it can also generate inner resolve and increased effort to thrive through one's own resources.⁴⁰

Contemporary author Rachel Cusk recently described her breakthrough into a new mode of writing while writing her books *Outline* (2014)⁴¹ and *Transit* (2016)⁴² in a similar way. In an interview for *Politics and Prose*, Cusk described it as 'a crisis of belief.'⁴³ Unexpected and sad events in her life had brought her to a place where familiar ways of living, making decisions, and communicating with others – in fact her whole inner concept of reality – was unravelling. Though outwardly she maintained her basic roles and responsibilities, inwardly she felt traumatized. She found herself to be in a state of deep and paralytic passivity, unable to act according to any structure or plan.⁴⁴

In her mid-forties Cusk realised that there was no reality, no meaningful structure,

³⁹ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 180.

⁴¹ R. Cusk, *Outline* (Random House, 2015).

⁴² *Transit* (Random House, 2016).

⁴³ *Politics and Prose*, Rachel Cusk, "Transit" *Politics and Prose* (You Tube Politics & Prose, 2017), Video

⁴⁴ Ibid.

only what she had been told by others. Being a writer, she began to attempt to describe this passive state of being by writing her passing reflections and observations of others and events. She could not participate fully in an event at the time because of her detached and distracted state, but by writing about it afterwards, the fullness of her experience and interactions began to very slowly take shape. While (as she states) the events and characters of her recent novels are not autobiographical, they do reflect the experiences she traversed and grappled with over time.⁴⁵ Her retrospective reflections enabled her to reconstitute her own sense of self and become more confident in her intentions. Nine out of ten sentences, she describes in the interview, led her to a dead end, but slowly a new mode of crafting her literary skills began to emerge.

For me Cusk's writing style is immediately appealing to the screenwriter. It is as if we are listening to her talk about her life and experiences, just as she might to a friend over coffee. Although literary in style and much more refined than conversational syntax, Cusk's writing never feels superficial. Her authentic self is visible on every page.

Just as with Cusk, the character of Lauren in *Dance Drama* recounts her relationship with her husband in an effort to find a new way of being, understanding, and working. Ultimately it seems that Lauren fails and returns to what she knows despite its problems. Lauren's rants are much like Cusk's writing process. They flail about searching, fumbling, and hoping to reconstitute a sense of self that has disappeared.

With these understandings of emotion in hand, we instinctively return to the notion of a transitional space being held. By its very nature, this space allows for a searching of the darkness, for ideas, thoughts, and feelings to enter into an arena of ambiguous possibility. As portrayed in the film, this space must be protected and fought for so that it can be maintained. It is often guided by craft or artistic method,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

as portrayed by Jean, yet is often subconsciously sought but abandoned, as portrayed by Lauren. Dialogue provides one of the most valuable tools available to people when in this transitional space.

Conclusion: A stance for dialogue

The story arc of *Dance Drama* could be described as subverting a typical sports film; A charismatic leader helps a group of underdogs get to a prestigious sporting event. Only, In *Dance Drama*, A teacher fails to wrangle underdogs and guide them to an acclaimed festival. The linear three act structure was at times considered during the writing process and developing the story arc. But it was understanding that Jean was trying to hold and maintain a space for her students that was most productive in generating dialogue, and in turn, how the story twists and turns.

As a writer, I felt the ‘stance triangle,’ and ‘holding a space,’ played on the imagination differently, in that I was not trying to understand how Jean may overcome and win, but how she could hold a space for certain people. The story Arc was influenced by this imaginative process, where the final story events see Jean fail at creating a dance show for an international audience, but perhaps succeed in holding a small intimate space between herself, her niece and Chris.

This subversion of a typical sports story arc comes to interrogate the value of Jean's character and the concept of holding a space. What price needs to be paid for Jean to hold a space for certain people, be it a cultural, interpersonal or an ideological price.

How encouraging it is when we find a human who has found a way to take the energy of loss, pain, and hardship, and transform it into beautiful art, productive work, or meaningful words. In my screenplay *Dance Drama* the central character of Jean is the human who takes on this challenge. Her conversations, dance practice

and role as a teacher all strive to transform energy into art. She strives to hold a space that can help her students, her family and herself be expressive and connect to each other.

The dramatic pause, the holding of breath, a stillness held in the body and mind – these are human blessings – abilities to hold and contain the flow of energy, and then transform it with thoughts and feelings in the search for new possibilities and ways of being. These same thoughts and feelings can also be a human curse, as they contend with energy and transform it in destructive and disturbed ways. How troubled we are to find a human who transforms energy into destruction and torture.

A human being sits at the fulcrum of energy transformation, trying their best to make it positive and meaningful, but they are often overwhelmed by the task and can only relay that energy as bad or good. How much transformative power is available to a single human? What rituals, ideas, customs, and habits do we enlist to maintain ourselves so that the energy we breathe and ingest can be manifested as we desire? How do different spaces and environments facilitate and inform how we manage the flow of energy within our reach? How are these spaces made? Is it a whole institution, a family home, a room, a body? Is it an idea held between people in dialogue? All these questions were provoked while developing and writing the screen play *Dance Drama*. The screen play *Dance Drama* aims to hold a space where the answers to these questions can emerge as possibility and insight.

Prior to undertaking this research, I understood that dialogue was an integral part of my screenwriting process, but I was often relying on intuition to create and shape the dialogue of my characters. Furthermore, writing large amounts of dialogue often felt like a guilty pleasure, as if I was indulging in an aspect of filmmaking that is better minimized, reduced, and made to serve the image. In the face of the film culture's preference for the visual, the value attributed to conversation and dialogue by linguists provided impetus to explore its power.

The concept of stance proved to encompass all types of conversation. A concept that could be implemented broadly across a range of characters, scenarios, and the breadth of the feature film screenplay *Dance Drama*. In particular, I felt empowered to write dialogue that revelled in more emotion and was being used to push a stance. In essence, the notion of stance allowed my dialogue to have more bite.

Further informed by research into emotion and the transitional space, the stance triangle became a holding space in which people's energies could collide, play, negotiate, transform, and discover through dialogue. In this sense, the stance triangle helps in visualizing dialogue as a type of energy. This process of visualization is an important way of giving dialogue imaginative presence in the mind, and bringing it to the centre of a screenwriting process.

Each theory or concept as adopted by my process purveys its own ideology, by virtue of seeing value and power in its focus. The research has not only informed the process of how to write *Dance Drama*, but also the thematic concerns that are explored. In this sense, *Dance Drama* comes to represent the importance that dialogue plays in our everyday lives. It shows the power of a transitional space, and conveys the drama of trying to maintain and define such a space.

In undertaking this investigation, I have come to realise that there is a link between research, process, and the resulting screenplay's ideology. This link suggests that any screenwriter should be wary of the standard culture and usual methods used to write and develop a screenplay. Though the quest for new ideologies is always precarious, inherent with its own presumptive dangers, one puts a shoulder to the wheel at some point, and takes a stance.

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Writing dialogue: stance, space, and emotion

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