



an exegesis, and open letter,
from Andrew (Drus) Dryden

ABSTRACT

closer: a collection of letters from Drus Dryden

I need you so much closer

-- Benjamin Gibbard, *Transatlanticism* *

closer explores the potential of autobiographical writing, in the form of a collection of letters, to facilitate psychic healing. Drawing upon aspects of the writing cure, *closer* is interested in how writing may slowly allow me to process past traumatic relationships and deepen intimacy in current ones.

* Benjamin Gibbard is an American singer/songwriter from the band Death Cab for Cutie. I listen to music constantly, and creating a musical and emotional landscape for a work helps me to write it. One of my favourite Death Cab for Cutie songs, *Brothers on a Hotel Bed*, is here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtZq0Y3JMXQ

Strangely, I've only just realised what the song is about; here I was thinking it was about brothers and a hotel bed.

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Andrew Dryden
17 . 10 . 2010

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Andrew Dryden
17 . 10 . 2010

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There is a delightful story for why I was a couple of minutes late, too, for my first class. For this I would like to thank the delicious Rebecca Sutton.

I couldn't have done this without the gentle support and encouragement of Mary Farrell, my unofficial supervisor.

Thanks to James George & the Johnsons. Great band name, guys, when's the album coming out? Lisa 'Antarctica' Williams, thanks again SO MUCH for your Shackeltonesque persistence. Welby Ings, you are not forgotten. I sometimes conjure your smile from our meetings.

Thanks and congratulations to my study buddies, Dr. Tia and Mistress Hellen.

Thanks to my classmates. I'm looking forward to finding out whodunnit?, and to reading proof that short stories are worth the paper they're printed on. I can't wait to reacquaint myself with Grafton, Mangere and Waiheke, and to visit Kawerau, Croatia and the 19th century for the first time. I'm currently benchpressing 225,000 words, soon I'll be ready for Alana's magnum opus. Do you need a romantic lead for your screenplay, Alan? Suneal, someone once called me "the big man with a big heart"; I think you would make his head explode.

Ashley Neese, ineedyouso.com, is a big inspiration. Literally, there are giant banners of her in my house.

And last & greatest, Mum & Dad. Thanks for Everything.

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DEAR EXAMINER,

closer is the slow, deliberate and laborious process of psychic healing through autobiographical writing. My work this year has been about processing bad relationships from the past, and nurturing them in the present. It's about writing out all the pain and learning from it.

An important thing to understand about *closer* is that it is not primarily written to be published, although I have sent some of the letters, and I intend to self-publish a selection of the letters on my website, sensitiveboyfriend.com. *closer* uses writing foremost as a therapeutic tool, to aid my recovery. I call it a 'self-help book', because writing it has helped me.

Narrative structure of the collected letters is not a priority either, although *closer* is informed by an understanding of how the creation of a cogent narrative may be conducive to healing (Frank, 1995). In the work and the manuscript, letters are grouped by subject, e.g. high school, and ordered by date. I am more interested in what unexpected patterns and discoveries might ensue from my heuristic enquiry, than developing a narrative.

In a class critique I was challenged as to whether I believed in the writing cure, and why writers feel like they need "to understand everything." Karl Lagerfeld, the fashion designer, states that great civilisations have existed without psychoanalysis (Marconi, 2006); I'm not sure if he was referring specifically to New Zealand. Likewise you don't *have* to wear Chanel, or read Kurt Vonnegut, Jonathan Safran Foer, or Oscar Wilde. I feel like there is Resistance to therapy in New Zealand, and therapy is one thing I investigate with an open mind in *closer*.

I have undertaken another project this year in conjunction with *closer*, Sensitive boyfriend gift design. There have been a number of successes, including coming runner up in the AUT Venture Fund award. This work was commercial, rather than academic, so I do not discuss it in my exegesis, although there are parallels between the two.

This exegesis is divided into a positioning statement, critical framework, methodology, and a note on presentation. I have not rigidly applied the conventions of academic writing. The theory of the writing cure is not complicated, and I want to make this explanation as accessible as possible.

I hope you enjoy finding out about my work as much as I've enjoyed writing it.

POSITIONING STATEMENT

Scrivener (2000) states that “a creative-production project... should begin with a reflection on past practice” (p. 9).

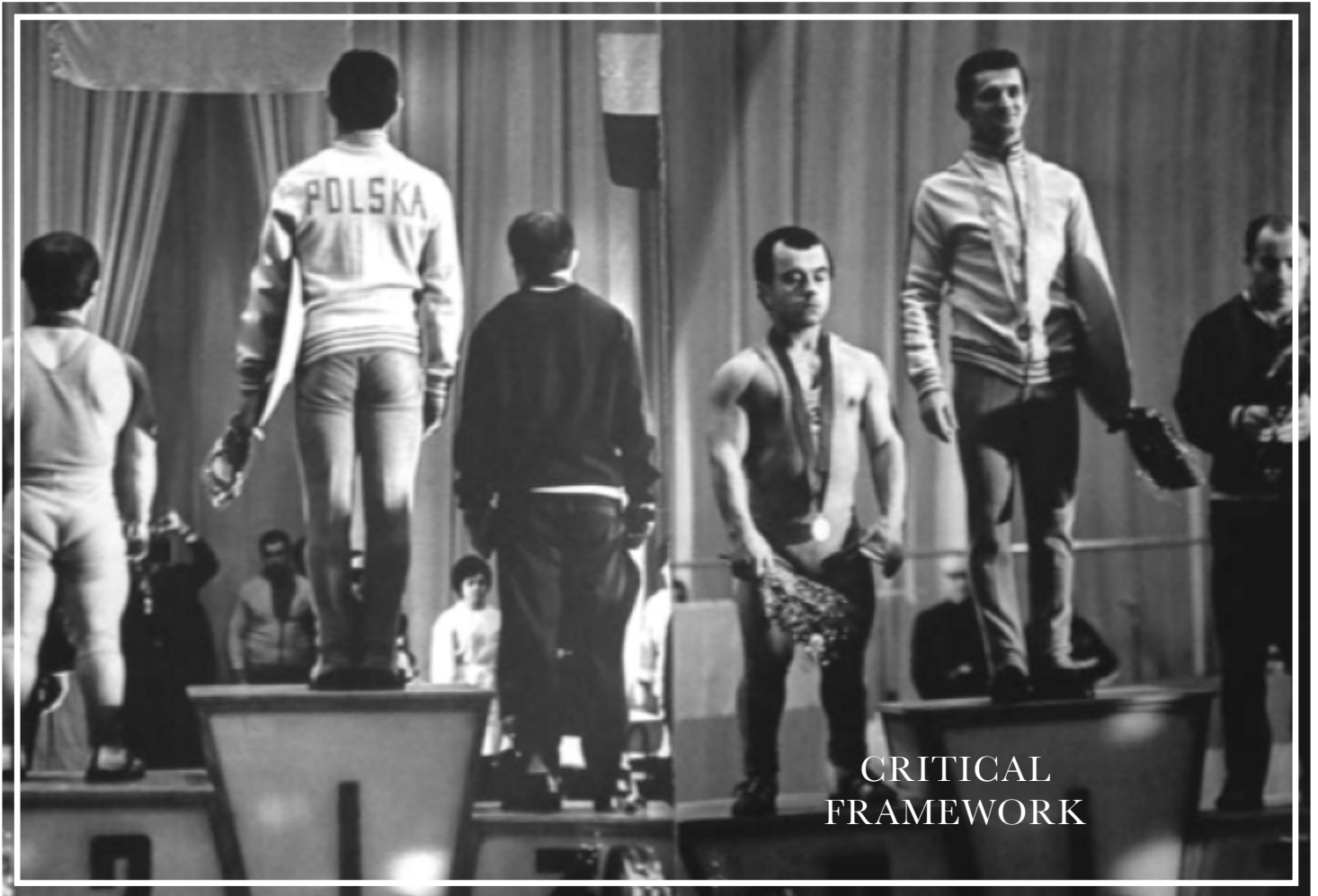
It all finally came to a head in 2006.

I had worked for five years on unpaid internships at 25 different creative companies, including ad agencies, design firms and publishing houses. I was never properly compensated for my work, nor was I allowed any stability in my position. Projects often didn't eventuate, and at the end of the five years of work, I had only around 25 examples of ads that had run or products that had been made. My bosses (I almost said superiors), workmates and creative partners (you work in teams of two) were cut-throat, and my faith in people was severely shaken by working in this environment. I used to say that I would be in the same career position if I had been in a coma for five years, except that I wouldn't be so bloody tired.

In this time I had also experienced a number of personal setbacks including a broken engagement to Emelie, the Norse Goddess of Thunder, and major falling-outs with friends, a creative partner (Madelame) and family members. My growing distrust of others made me feel very isolated. When I needed support most, I didn't have many people to turn to. Although my family stood by me, they just didn't seem to understand how much shit I had gone through. This was devastating for me.

Previous to this I had also developed Post-Concussion Syndrome following a physical attack in 1998. This grew into Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, which manifested itself as an excessive preoccupation with my health, instead of confronting the emotions that were really troubling me from the attack.

Eventually I had a breakdown from living on this dull knife edge, and had to come home from overseas in December 2006. In 2007 I wrote a book, *Male submissive needed*, about interning. I loved having a creative outlet for my anger and believed that pursuing a Masters degree would provide me with a block of time in which I could embark on similar self-determined, creatively-fulfilling projects. It was time to “redraw the map and find new destinations” (Frank, 1995, p. 1).



Brodulin, L. (1960). *The Lightweight World Champions*. New York: The Palladian Collection
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I used this image for an Sb postcard.

introduction

This chapter discusses autobiography and the writing cure, and how they might be used together to facilitate psychic healing. It also examines the letter as an appropriate form of expression for curative autobiography.

autobiography & the writing cure

Autobiography considered in its broadest sense has been defined as “a biography written by the subject about himself or herself ” (Abrams, 1999, p. 22). Its purpose is “to tell the story of one’s life” (Gilmore, 2001, p. 3). St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (1998), published in 398 AD, is often acknowledged as the first Western autobiography (Abrams, 1999). As its story centres on the author’s journey from personal crisis to religious conversion, it may be considered as a forerunner to the curative autobiography. Though Augustine did not undertake the project to heal himself, the work documents the ‘healing’ that occurred with his conversion to Christianity.

Today, Hawkins (1999) argues, first person accounts of adverse experiences have replaced stories of religious conversion. The modern day author focuses not so much on an encounter with God as the source of healing but on the resolution through storytelling. As Frank (1995) explains, “people tell stories to make sense of their suffering; when they turn their suffering into stories, they find healing” (p. 1).

Such an endeavour finds its roots in the ‘writing cure’, a notion with a significant literary history that posits that writing can heal. Kaufman and Sexton (2006) contend that the writing of cogent narratives improves both mental and physical health. Lepore and Smyth (2002) offer research that details the positive impact of writing on cognitive, emotional and biological aspects of well-being.

World War Two concentration camp survivor Primo Levi (1988) wrote of his ordeal in order to construct a reason to go on living, as a witness to the Holocaust. Bailey (in Levi) states that Levi “lived in a zombie like existence in the months immediately following his liberation, before he made the momentous decision to confront his fears with the aid of words” (Levi, 1988, p. x). Writing was the means he chose to bring order to the chaos wrought in his life by his experiences in Auschwitz; it enabled him to testify against the horrors he endured and thereby resist them.

Writers themselves have also directly addressed the efficacy of the writing cure. Israeli writer David Grossman (2007) found the only way to come to terms with the death of his son, a soldier in the Israeli Army, was to write about it.

In the wake of the death of my son Uri last summer, in the war between Israel and Lebanon, the power of memory is indeed enormous and heavy, and at times has a paralyzing quality. Nevertheless, the act of writing itself at this time creates for me a space, a mind set that I've never experienced before, where death is not only the absolute, one-dimensional negation of life (para. 8).

how curative writing works

The motivation for curative writing often seems to stem from the desire to “become other than what one is” (Foucault cited in Gilmore, 2001, p. 1). The author hopes to stimulate an ‘anagnorisis’, a transition from ignorance to knowledge. Lee (2005) calls this a ‘sublimation’, or a positive transformation of emotions. By conducting a profound inner inquiry the individual uncovers unique perspectives and for those who are coming to terms directly with illness, they are able to make use of their suffering (Lee, 2005).

Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) outline the way in which the curative writing process works; as they state “constructing stories is a natural human process that helps people to understand their experiences and themselves.” (p. 1243). The process is simple, but requires courage, persistence and sensitivity to face distressing subjects.

Frank (1995) states how the memory traumatic event may exist as a chaotic narrative in the mind of the sufferer. One way to instil a sense of order into this narrative is to document it. To do this you must simplify the subject, often a mess of emotions, into a cogent narrative. You introduce setting, characters and plot like you would in any other story. You have an outlet for your thoughts or feelings. You tame the story, by giving it “structure and meaning.” Written, the memory “becomes more manageable” (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999, p. 1243). You begin to remember it the way you have written it. Now the subject is simplified you can begin to understand it. Understanding is the crucial step in processing the memory; you resolve the issue, and hopefully learn not to repeat it. This results “in less rumination and eventually allows disturbing experiences to subside closer from conscious thought” (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999, p. 1243). The enduring effect is that the writer regains the sense of control relinquished in a traumatic experience.

letter writing & closer

There are a number of reasons why *closer* uses the form of the letter. Firstly, I use letters because *closer* addresses relationships. Letters are normally between two people, and as such are ‘auto/biographical.’ Auto/biography results when the author cannot tell his story in isolation, because it is “indissoluble with another’s story.” (Gilmore, 2001, p. 8).

Frank (1995) links auto/biography to dyadic communication. He describes how

a wounded storyteller can seek resolution in two ways: as a 'monadic body' in solitude, or by reaching out to other people, as a 'dyadic body' in communication with others. As Levinas (cited in Frank, 1995) states

wherever a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh happen there is the original call for aid, for curative help from the other ego whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation (p.177).

My letters seek dyadic resolution through communication with others. I would argue that this is true, even when I do not send the letter. Any letters written help to heal the relationship, even if just to allow me to process it and understand why it has broken down.

I also use the letter because it is made for short, strong statements of opinion. Throughout the project I have regularly read the *Letters of Note* blog, which publishes a considered celebrity letter daily. Often these letters seek to eloquently resolve a point of difference. A light-hearted, but good example of this is a letter written by the fourteen year-old Slash, of the band Guns'n'Roses.

Tuesday
Oct. 2. 79

Dear Michele,

Your letter scared me, upon first glance, I hadn't any idea what it was about, but when you told me, it struck in a strange way, I hadn't any idea that I talked about my guitar so often, I'm going to have to change that, no matter who I talk to.

It's a drag that it screwed up our relationship, you should have told me sooner, but I don't think that's the only reason, you just don't like me that much, and I can see why, because I'm a hard person to get along with at times.

But anyway I'm glad we got that straight, thank you for not lying to me. To get off the subject, you look really nice today, you get prettier & prettier every day. My weekend was pretty good. Steve came by and we went to a couple parties, and we went to the Starwood, I spent pretty much all of my weekend on cloud 9 if you know what I mean.

I had never been in the Starwood before, like, we hung around outside, but I've never been inside. It's not such a hot place, I mean the Bands are alright, the girls are pretty (I still think you cuter than any of the girls there) the drugs are cool but it's not a place I would want to waste my life at. The most exciting part of the night was, a guy mouthed off to this black guy, and the black got a hundred friends and chased him around all Hollywood. It's a pretty crazy place. I'm going there next week to see Quiet Riot, because I hear there (sic) pretty good. One of these days I'll play there.

Love you

Saul

(Hudson, 1979, n.p.).

Slash uses the letter as an outlet for his feelings about the break-up. He creates a narrative for the break-up, leading to an understanding of why the relationship failed. Eventually he comes to peace with its passing, and gracious in defeat. They remained friends (Usher, 2010).

I also use letters because they are an off-beat medium in this digital age. I like to think someone feels special when they receive a missive from me. The recipient knows that I have put more thought into them than an ephemeral email or a txt. They are seen as personal and intimate, with an audience of one, but often contain things that I could not easily voice in person. Hopefully they are something the addressees will value, even if the letters are not universally positive, because they are a bridge between us. As Mavity says, they are a “pitch” (Bayley & Mavity, 2007, p. 199) to deepen our relationship.

Fellow letter artists Clayton and Crowe (Clayton & Crowe, 2010) are writing a letter to everyone in the world, one town at a time. Their goal is to “spread a little butter! (Joy)” (n.p.) As they rightly ask, “who absolutely hates letters?”

closer letter examples

I divide my letters into two basic groups. ‘Conflict resolution’ letters try to process a difficult point in a relationship that I still think of. The aim of the letter is to write through this lingering conflict if the relationship is on-going, or to forget it if the relationship is over. I also write letters which I call ‘relationship building’ letters. These letters aim to consciously deepen a connection I have with someone.

This is an example of a ‘Conflict resolution’ letter. My relationship with my Mum has not always been close. Writing this letter, which I never sent, allowed me to address issues in our relationship.

Dear Mum:

I am wondering if you feel like you have to reclaim your family’s honour, after the tragedy that occurred to your mother and her family. Talking to Berry about it, it is terribly sad. And thank God it’s over and we don’t live in 1920. I know that some people sometimes feel irrationally responsible for the things that mercilessly happened to them, but the horrors your mother endured are the fault of no one except the step-mother and shitty, shitty luck. It wasn’t her fault she was orphaned, there is no need for her to feel ashamed of it, nor for you to feel like you have to reclaim any lost honour on her behalf.

If you're wondering what I'm talking about, I can feel your resistance, it's just that I have noticed that you are keen to look for illustrious ancestors in your past. Is that not why you chose to buy the farm, because your, our family broke that part of the country in? As well as your insistence that the Bullens were descended from Anne Boylen, or the Norman derivation of Warren. Your recent insistence that I contact Prince William, I assure you he's just a normal guy who has got lucky, or unlucky depending on how you look at it, the same as your mum got unlucky.

Perhaps I pick up on your heightened sense of shame because you've sometimes tried to make me feel ashamed. I guess an example of this was when you told me to 'get a life' when I had just come back from Amsterdam. Or when you asked me if I look at child porn. Or when you thought out loud that I was going to be like the guy who does military drills in the park in the middle of my OCD summer. Criticizing my hypochondria instead of helping me through it, particularly as it stems so obviously from you. When you told me you thought I was capable of making a positive contribution to society . . . gee, thanks mum. When I tried to eat avocado as a seven year-old so you'd like me. Your ever-vigilance about any potential embarrassment I might cause you, like when you seemed to take Sam's side in our break-up.

I haven't got anything to be ashamed of, and I won't act like I do just because I don't have a steady job or I'm not rigidly conservative or whatever it is that you want from your children, like you even know what that is. Sometimes life is just down to luck and all you can do is be thankful for the things that are going well and try to improve anything that isn't. That staying true to your beliefs, despite things not going exactly as you planned is something to be proud of. It means you have something left when everything else is taken away from you. That's when you find out who you are, when a torrent has stripped everything but the most stubborn grit away. I'm not trying to make you feel guilty, just make you realise the impact you have on others and to stand up for myself.

I wonder if your fundamental dislike of men is related to your grandfather not stopping his new wife from hurting his children. She was probably just hurting his children as a way of hurting him for hurting her, or just to preempt any hurt she was scared he could do to her again. Everyone is just fucking scared.

I know you don't want to hurt anyone, and I see you trying hard with your grand daughters. It's not too late to do the same with me, dad, James, Janet and Murdoch or anyone else.

Sensitively,

Andrew

(Dryden, 2010, n.p.)

Writing this letter forced me to confront my mum about times that she's hurt me. I could process some of the feelings that have resulted from this. I started to understand how the way she treated me was a legacy of my grandmother's horrific childhood with her abusive step-mother. I could stop feeling like I'd failed her in some way, when perhaps the reverse is true. To quote Phillip Larkin (2010):

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were sippy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.

(n.p.)

In the months since writing this and other letters to her, I feel like my relationship with her has improved. She has always been very protective of me, and it's hard for me to tell her when I've been injured. I was recently hurt in a bike accident, with a driver who refused to take any responsibility. It took a couple of days to tell her it had happened, but eventually we discussed it around the kitchen table. One funny thing that happened then was that she made me look up and tell her his home address. Is she going to write to him? She writes magnificent complaint letters, so I hope so.

As my confidence grew from my writing, I began to emotionally reach out with 'relationship building' letters, which aim to nurture my current relationships. An example is a letter from my *Memory Reminder* Service. I advertised a service in which friends could request a reminder of our favourite memory. This was Jenny's *Memory Reminder*:

Dear Jenny:

I was going to say that my favourite memory was the time you guys stayed in Steve's meticulous room and photographed all his stuff on his bed so you could put it back together again.

But on reflection over the last few days I'm swaying towards meeting your

mother at Rotoiti on that weekend away. She just seemed so gentle and kind, a calm centre. I imagine her as a really loving mum to you; I imagine you are the same kind of mom to Moebius. One thing I've realised this year is that sort of stuff like this is passed down from generation to generation, just as much as brunette ringlets. Not that your mum has those, but little Moebius maybe, when he gets some hair?

xo,
Drus

(Dryden, 2010, n.p.)

To trust others to respond positively to the *Memory Reminder* Service required courage and self-belief. Some recipients didn't respond at all. Jenny, an artist, responded in kind; she sent me her favourite memory of us. She later participated in a *Bad relationship* Writing Competition I was running. Her dazzling entry, which evoked the mood of teenage romance perfectly, won.

I don't know Jenny very well, she is a good friend of a close friend. She lives overseas, so I don't see her often. When I saw her at the beginning of the year, I felt that writing to each other had fostered a tender bond between us, even if we didn't discuss the writing when I saw her. She is obviously sensitive herself, and I would suggest that we tacitly recognise this in each other.

I feel like I should state that I don't have a giant crush on Jenny, to show that that wasn't the purpose of my writing. She's married to a wonderful guy, a famous rock musician, who is super friendly as well. He is obviously of the 'Slash' School of Rock. They recently had their second child, Iris Honeybee, who looks quite adorable in Facebook photos.

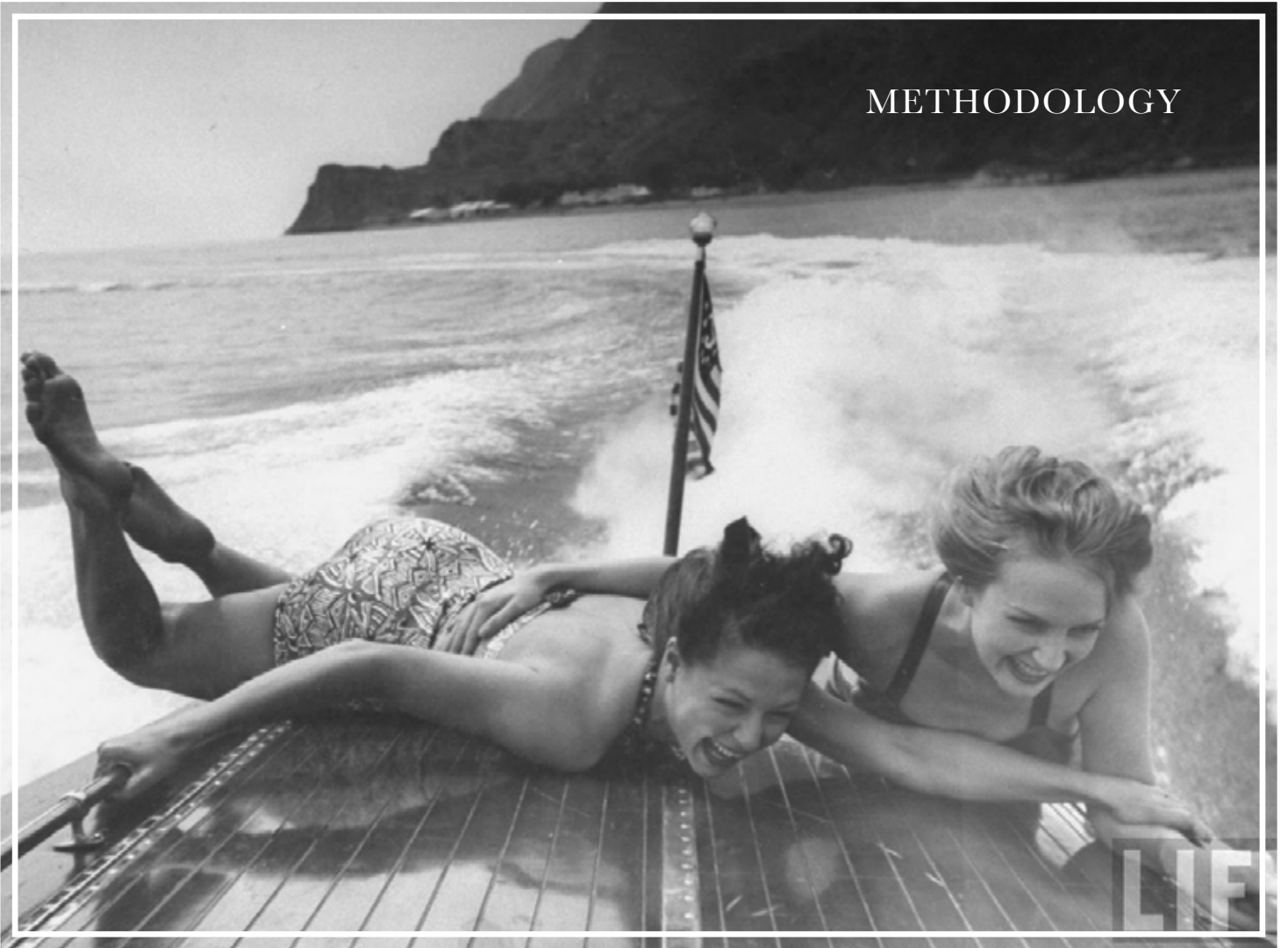
conclusion

Writing *closer* has really helped me process the bad relationships I have been in, and to reach out to people again. I have learnt from the past, and realised that I cast some of my pearls before swine. I actually remember a fortune cookie I opened in front of Madelame once. It read:

don't wrestle with a pig in mud, you both get dirty and the pig likes it

If I cast pearls now, I do it before darlings. And when I'm lucky, they throw diamonds back.

METHODOLOGY



Stackpole, P. (1941). *Betty Brooks and Patti McCarty motor boating at Catalina Island.*

Retrieved 14th of November, 2010 from

<http://images.google.com/hosted/life/1?q=motor+source:life&imgurl=b8e0207835d8d1d6>

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I used this image for an Sb postcard.

introduction

With *closer* I have used a tailor-made methodology which maximises opportunity for personal discovery. This methodology is heuristics-based, and also incorporates ‘underachievement.’

Under-achievement

While not strictly a research methodology, the idea of ‘under-achievement’¹ informed this project. It allowed me to approach *closer* in an ambitious but achievable manner that prioritised its curative goal.

Bennett (2006) maintains that individuals should aim high but not cause themselves suffering by striving for impossible goals. Bennett suggests applying a good amount of effort at the right time, instead of maximum effort all the time. ‘Under-achievement’ encourages rigour and accomplishment, just not at the sacrifice of well-being. It might be better called ‘under-achievement for perfectionists.’

‘Under-achieving’ expressed itself in deciding to write short, daily letters. Instead of undertaking one large work I could undertake hundreds of smaller works. This made *closer*, and my healing process, more approachable, flexible and dynamic. Working this way demonstrated that success is achieved by a consistent, sustainable effort, rather than by an inspired display of virtuosity. Slow and steady won this race.

This project design was a good way of rebelling against a culture of ‘glorious’ achievement to overcome emotional problems, a pattern I have noticed in some over-achievers. An example is Martin Strel, who has swum the lengths of the Amazon, Danube, Mississippi and Yangtze Rivers. He relates his over-achievement to being forced to swim away from his abusive father, in a freezing river (Florio, 2009).

An example of an ‘heroic’, over-achieving author might be Ernest Hemingway, one of the most renowned writers of the twentieth century. In the face of declining health, and with a family history of suicide, Hemingway tragically took his own life, aged 61 (Liukkonen, 2010).

1: The Under-achiever’s Manifesto offers nine principles to apply:

1. Life’s too short
2. Control is an illusion
3. Expectation leads to misery
4. Great expectations lead to great misery
5. Achievement creates expectations
6. The law of diminishing returns applies everywhere
7. Perfect is the enemy of good
8. The tallest blade is the surest to be cut
9. Accomplishment is in the eye of the beholder

(Bennett, 2006, p. 29-30).

The fact that *closer's* priority is curative, not to be published and validated by others, removes the burden for an unpublished writer. 0.5% of unsolicited manuscripts are published, which makes published writers over-achievers by definition.

Under-achieving also expresses itself in the proofreading of *closer*. 99% of the letters, and this exegesis, use proper grammar and spelling. However, there is sure to be a rogue, or one-hundred, in there. The important thing is that *closer* is written as well as possible, and serves its curative goal, without letting inevitable, minor flaws detract from this. The typos are part of this very Human work.

closer does not have an end-point, other than the hand-in deadline. Being open-ended has its benefits; namely that as long as I keep my chin up and writing, the project cannot fail. There is no lofty bar to pass, just a light daily commitment to continue.

As for my mark, I will be quite happy to pass with corrections. Anything better is a bonus. I'm happy I carried the project through.

heuristics

closer uses a heuristics-based methodology. Heuristics seek discovery and is useful for projects, such as this one, in which no pre-established formula for discerning the outcome of the research exists (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Moustakas (1990) also claims that heuristics are an effective approach for researchers who maintain a significant personal involvement with a project's central question:

Heuristic enquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem, to which the researcher seeks to illuminate an answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives (p. 15).

Heuristics is well suited to research that incorporates the autobiographical. Gilmore (2001) states that it "pushes (an) individual forward out of a dense set of relations and into a subsequent struggle to figure out where the individual came from" (p. 12). Ings (2008) concurs, asserting, "heuristics, because it is aligned to autobiography, is self exposing" (p. 4). To confront the research question, the researcher must engage in a significant encounter with himself. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) call this "following the internal pathways of the self" (p.39).

One possible problem with a journey of discovery is that you don't know where, if anywhere, you'll end up. Like how Columbus discovered America by looking for a new route to the Spice Islands. However, you obviously can't discover something at all, unless you take a chance on leaving the shore. Heuristic projects can have an indeterminate length, and long gestation period; it's important to persist and continue.

Douglass and Moustakas' intent, with their study of heuristics, was to reintroduce aspects of exploration and discovery into psychological and sociological research, whilst providing a means for incorporating rigour and validity into the

experimentation process.

the principles of Kleining & Witt

I have applied Kleining and Witt's (2000, p. 1) four rules for heuristic inquiry to guide my research. These are:

1. The researcher should seek out a maximum variation of perspectives
2. The analysis is directed towards discovering patterns or similarities
3. The researcher is open to new concepts and will alter preconceptions if data contradicts them
4. The research topic is preliminary and may change

I found the rule that "data should be collected under the paradigm of maximum structural variation of perspectives" (Kleining & Witt, 2000, p. 2) to be essential as I made my initial approaches to a letter. Kleining and Witt (2000) assert that the value of this rule lies in its ability to avoid a one-sidedness of topic representation. Exploring it from different perspectives adds depth and surfaces latent aspects of the subject under investigation.

An example is the letter that I wrote to the guy who drove into me on my bike. He was a senior member of Saatchi & Saatchi, an advertising agency at which I used to intern. My initial desire was to write a letter explaining the accident to an ad industry magazine, and how it was a metaphor for what had happened to me working in advertising. I thought about painting the exit to the car park red. I wanted to write thank you letters to all the people who had helped me in the accident, from Mercedes-Benz who manufactured his brakes, to Bell who manufactured my helmet, to the friend who had driven me to Accident & Emergency.

Of course I wanted to write to the driver of the car, but he hadn't left his details, I just knew where he worked. It occurred to me that I could leave a letter on his car. The initial letter I wrote addressed this in an indirect way. Finally I wrote him a direct letter, which I sent, emailed and finally dropped into his office. I realised through this process that my ideas were not engaging him directly, and that this was something I needed to do. I was badly hurt and the bike was destroyed, and I needed to confront him about the damage he'd caused. He didn't seem to care about how close he'd come to killing me and I had to get that across to him.

Ings (2008) states that heuristics relies fundamentally upon the practitioner's ability to locate "patterns, similarities, analogies or creative connections" (p. 5). This assertion echoes Kleining and Witt's (2000) rule: "The analysis is directed toward discovery of similarities" (p. 3). As the researcher reviews his data, he tries to locate patterns that may not have been discernible in an earlier stage of data collection.

I saw a pattern in that all the letters had a longing for intimacy. Hence the discovery was that I felt my relationships lacked intimacy. For example I wrote to

my dad's rowing friends, asking if I could interview them. Ostensibly I wanted to ask them about their 1968 Olympic campaign. But as my research progressed, I realised I was trying to build a more intimate relationship with him, albeit in an oblique way. I wanted to understand what happened in Mexico more, but I also wanted my Dad to talk to me about it, himself.

With the help of my therapist, I also started to notice a pattern in the people I was writing to were especially troubled me. They were often narcissistic personalities. It is quite hard to be close to this type of person because they are so self-involved they can be oblivious to the other person in the relationship. A sign of this could be that they could not take the slightest criticism, despite dispensing it liberally. I wrote a letter to one of my oldest friends, Ed, about what I saw as impediments to true closeness between us. Because he only saw the criticism, not the opportunity to improve our friendship, we're not really friends anymore. It was good to be able to see the negative pattern in our relationship and understand why I shouldn't perpetuate it for another ten years.

Kleining and Witt's (2000) rule states that "the researcher should be open to new concepts and change his/her preconceptions if the data are not in agreement with them" (p. 2). Kleining and Witt assert that discoveries often contradict preconceived notions.

closer began as a private blog, *fashion & feelings* (Dryden, 2010), designed as a monadic vehicle for psychic healing. For example, any early post discussed my anxieties about returning an article of clothing I had bought and the discomfort I felt asserting myself. I felt that writing a monadic, anonymous blog would be the most helpful way for me to write. After writing a number of blog posts, I felt confident enough to extend my communication beyond the blog itself by writing to others. This excerpt is from an anonymous letter I sent to a fashion store in Auckland:

Dear Myhart:

I'm just writing to say how much I enjoyed *Beat It* playing in your shop about a week ago . . . I have taken the liberty of including a mix-tape of some songs that I thought you and your clientele might enjoy.

(Dryden, 2009, n.p.)

I then published the entire letter in my blog, signalling a shift in my preconceptions about its purpose. From a private outlet for anguish, it was now a space to record my small steps in rebuilding my inter-personal relationships.

The next step was to write letters directly to people I knew. As an excuse to deepen my rapport with her, I asked my brother's ex-girlfriend, and my exercise partner, to help me bake a giant chocolate chip cookie. The resulting thank you letter to her connected the concepts of emotions and food, specifically eating your feelings. Eventually the letter to her become one of the many that make up

closer.

Recently I've been able to broach sensitive subjects in person, such as my Dad's Olympic rowing campaign, which we've never really talked about intimately. My Dad is quoted as saying

I've thought about (finishing fourth) a fair bit . . . like every day. There are various theories as to what went wrong that day, but no one seems to have come up with an answer.

(Bidwell, 2010, p. 53).

I just told him that I've always thought he was amazing, and that obviously it's an incredible (over-)achievement to be in an Olympic final at all.

My dad was recently involved in the organisation of a very successful World Rowing Championships. I made a point of saying what a good job he and the team had done, to him. This is a small gesture, but it's an example of a deliberate initiative to improve our relationship.

In a similar way, the research question evolved over the two years I have been writing *closer*. To begin with, I thought I had just had a run of bad luck, and once I had got myself away from advertising, living overseas and the more destructive relationships, I would be fine. I thought if I just wrote out some of the memories that had been plaguing me, I'd be able to forget them. And that once I took control of my creative practice, I wouldn't be as frustrated as I had been at the whim of others.

As I read about the chaotic narrative (Frank, 1995), I began to realise I might be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress. Its primary symptom is that the sufferer cannot organise his day-to-day life in the wake of a traumatic experience (Frank, 1995). Frank (1995) recommends writing as a way of instilling order into a chaotic life. I reasoned that the letters would allow me to gradually process and order yesterday and move forward today.

It was only after the bike accident that my therapist brought up what is now painfully obvious. The letters express my longing for intimate relationships. I have a very clear idea of what I'm doing, now that I have refined my research question to this.

therapy

Schön (1983) recommends asking for feedback as a way of improving a creative work. As part of *closer* I have attended weekly therapy sessions. I either send my therapist the letters I am writing before our sessions, or I read them out at the beginning.

I view this discussion as an essential part of my heuristic process. It really helps to be able to discuss the ideas and intense emotions in the letters with a sup-

portive professional. The therapist is a trusted confidante who can push me towards new insights, and suggest new avenues of inquiry. For example, it was the therapist that pointed out that while intimacy was something I longed for, I was simultaneously terrified of leaving myself open to getting hurt again. It's obvious now, but it was so ingrained that perhaps it wouldn't have even occurred to me that this was my fundamental issue. In this way therapy accelerates and gives a weekly structure to my heuristic process.

As you might imagine, given my intimacy issues, therapy is not a process I particularly enjoy. Talking about and accepting my emotions is not something I'm accustomed to. It's much easier to avoid the draining, emotional work it entails. But I'd prevaricated long enough. I needed help to confront my issues, and I'm glad I found it.

conclusion

I was delighted when Dominic Wilcox, one of my favourite designers, recently (Wilcox, 2010). He undertook to design and make a simple, new idea every day for a month. I heartily recommend a similar methodology to any writer who doesn't know exactly how or what they want to do, but can't wait to find out.

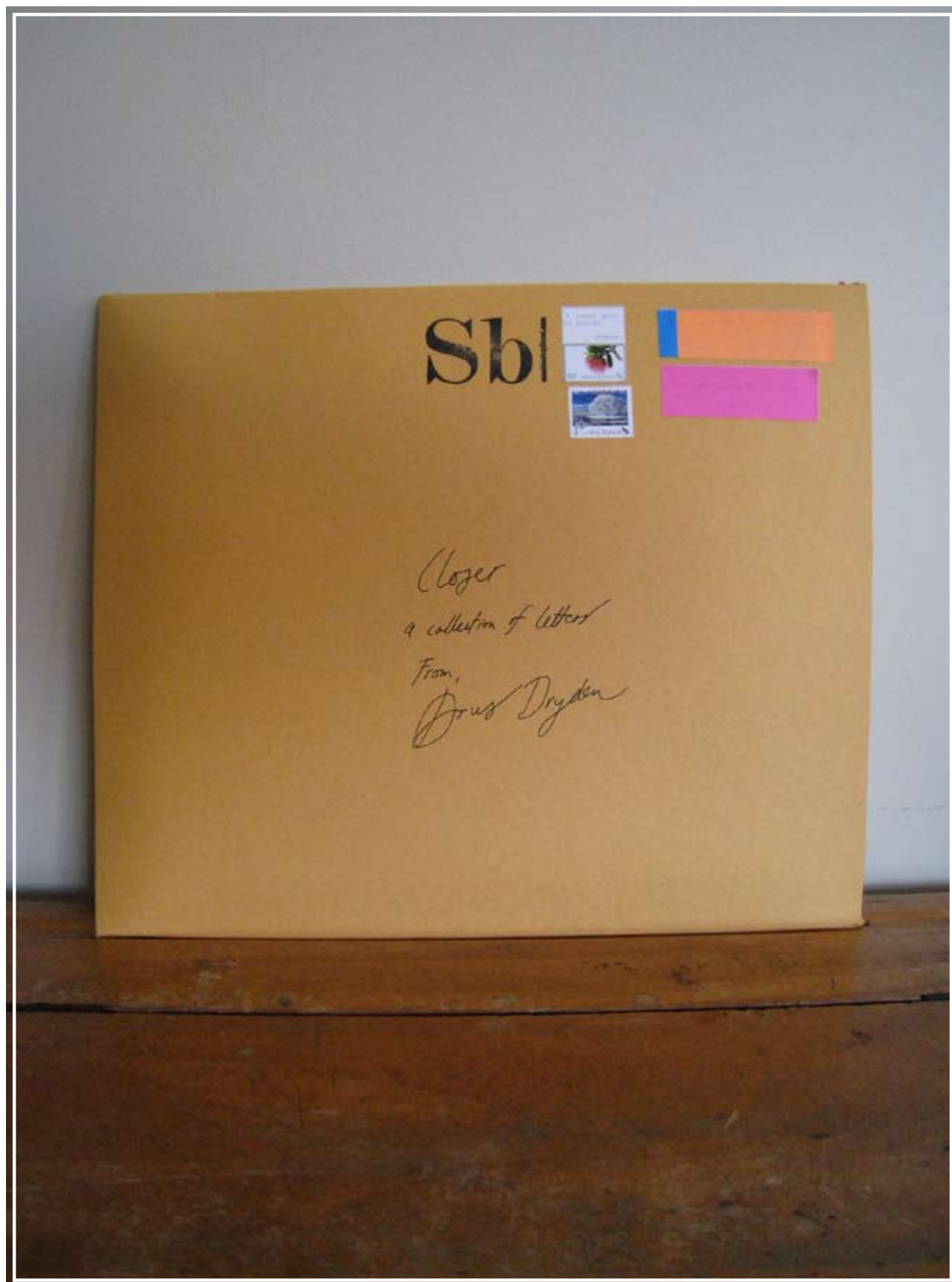


Fig. 1. Dryden, A. (2010). *Closer Envelope*.

PRESENTATION

As well as a writer, I am a conceptual designer. The final presentation of my writing is an important part of the project. After much deliberation I settled on two presentations, because this felt right for *closer*. This is an example of Schön's (1983) reflection-on-action; I have chosen my presentation based on an intuitive feeling on what the right 'fit' is.

Initially I am submitting the full text of *closer* for examination as a manuscript inside an envelope (fig. 1). It helps to see the project for what it is, a large collection of real letters, not a book of supposed ones.

After the examination I intend to release a PDF of selected letters on my website, sensitiveboyfriend.com.



Found image.

I used this image as an optimistic Facebook profile photo.

It's not going to stop 'till you wise up
-- Aimée Mann, *wise up*
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTI8ZiopycQ

I think back to my state of mind before the project, or read my timid early letters, and realize that I've come a long way, to places I wouldn't have predicted. I'm proud of myself, the work I've done, and the strides I've made.

It would be easy to say that everything is fine now, and I don't get affected by people or experiences anymore. Of course that's not true. Everything isn't tied up in a bow, nor should I expect it to be. Frank describes how sufferers often conclude their story by saying "but I'm fine now" (Frank, 1995), denying the opportunity to feel Human, vulnerable, and affected by adversity.

If there's one thing I would change about the 'writing cure', it's its name. It doesn't cure you. With a lot of work, you figure things out, and then forget your pain or prevent yourself from getting hurt again. A better name would be 'The School for Traumatized Writers.' Writing has really helped me to *learn* more about myself, which I've applied to make positive changes in my life. I've greatly processed people like Madelame and Duster, I've improved my relationship with family members, and I've found the strength to terminate destructive friendships. I'm learning to understand how to look after myself.

I've also learnt to accept myself, at whatever stage of the process I'm at. This is an ironic reclamation of control. Perhaps the flipside of determination to cure oneself is the patience to wait. You can't will 'getting better.' By not pushing myself to 'get better', I feel like I've confronted the fear of my own frailty. This acceptance is a sign of progress, and self-intimacy, which I've been longing for as much as intimacy with anyone else.

Another important realisation has been that I'm actually an introvert, and that I've been pushing myself to be social beyond what is comfortable. Little by little I've been able to accept my introversion, and the benefits it entails, within a culture that loudly promotes extroversion. I like being a thinker, a dreamer of dreams, some of which are just for me.

LOVE FROM,

Drus Dryden
Sensitive boyfriend

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