

A Collaborative Filmmaker: Similarities between David Cronenberg's Account on His Own Job and Harlene Anderson's Therapeutic Stance

Vanessa Manassero Baeza
Mexico City, Mexico

I would like to share an Internet finding that filled me with enthusiasm. When searching for materials for the class *Cine, Literatura y Escritura como Herramientas terapéuticas*ⁱ, I found on Youtube an interview with filmmaker David Cronenbergⁱⁱ, who shares ideas and experiences about the making of his films. Cronenberg describes concepts that I find akin to those proposed by therapist and author Harlene Andersonⁱⁱⁱ, when she describes the therapist stance from the postmodern and social construction perspectives. In my mind, I started exchanging the words filmmaker for therapist, actor for client, film for therapeutic process. Some days later, Dr. Anderson visited Mexico City and in one of her lectures she mentioned that more and more she thinks about what she does as an art. I associated her comment with Cronenberg's reflections about the way he conducts the making of a film. I feel like I'm shooting something that I discover, he declares that it is almost like a *Found Art*^{iv}. Harlene has talked about the difficulty of languaging or conveying her philosophic stance. Which is why I thought it would be interesting to share with the group these ideas and the video of Cronenberg's interview in order to generate thoughts and insights, borrowing the images and experiences of the filmmaker to illustrate with this analogy, Harlene's stance.

About the Voice of the Project

When Cronenberg is asked about his experience shooting films, he mentions that what really matters is the project at hand, it speaks to you about what it wants, I often think of it as listening to what the movie wants and giving it what it wants...I bring no pre-conceived ideas about what I should do. I've listened to Harlene talk about the importance of trust in the therapeutic process, about staying in the conversation and that it is from active listening that the therapist interacts. She has also spoken about not imposing pre-conceived ideas and listening to what the client needs. Harlene defines the concept of relational expertise which involves creating local knowledge in a joint way. The therapist acts as the expert in the process and the space to facilitate collaborative relationships and dialogic conversations. The filmmaker trusts in his films to evolve towards where they want to go.

About the Relationship with Others

When he speaks about the relationship with the actors, Cronenberg recognizes that he trusts them: I leave them alone the actors, that really is good. Get good actors and then let them be good. He does not imply that there is no work to be done with them; on the contrary, he is saying that when shooting the scene, a lot of that happens before you get on the set. They talk and exchange ideas about the script and the character working with them; then I just follow them. To Harlene, the client is the expert in his own life, she trusts in him and in the process, and in constructing through the language. I also connect this with the metaphor of being a guest in the other's life and the stance of being with. Cronenberg talks about informing the actor and then letting him be, which makes me think that they co-construct the character and that they hold collaborative conversations. Harlene suggests taking the time to connect, interact and design together the way they will work.

About the Role of Facilitator

There is a moment of the interview that gets my attention: when Cronenberg recalls that others have approached him to say that they don't think they have what a director needs, because in order to be to be a director they feel they have to be tough, willing to humiliate your actor and psychoanalyze them and to break them and bring them back up. The filmmaker points out that there are infinite ways to be a director, you need to find a way that you can function. He thinks that the actor, specially a professional and experienced one, becomes a collaborator. This takes me to the difference between those two stances: one where the therapist is directive and confrontative, and the other where he is a guest in the life of the client, and at the same time the host of the conversation. Harlene distinguishes the uniqueness of each participant in the dialogue and the importance to find one's own way of being a therapist. Harlene maintains that the pre-assumptions by the therapist influence their perspectives and that these lead to different ways of being in the world. This being with and witness is at the very heart of the collaborative practices.

About Constructing with Others

Unlike others who think they need to be an expert in lighting, soundtrack, wardrobe and other elements in the making of a film, I find interesting that Cronenberg considers that he does not have to be superb in every element and that means you have to accept the collaborative element of film making, you have to allow people to help you. Undoubtedly, as a filmmaker, he makes decisions where he filters and chooses, but in a way that invites his team to collaborate. He allows each one to contribute with the knowledge and expertise in his own area. This relates to Harlene's words about co-constructing with others and the different areas of expertise of the participants in the dialogue.

About Vulnerability and Strength

There are limitations in any human activity. Even a successful filmmaker like Cronenberg describes that the resources for every film are limited and there are budget and time restrictions, among others. In the therapeutic space there are also external demands, institutional guidelines, time constraints or restrictions in the number of sessions to support a client. I admire the fact that the filmmaker recognizes in the interview that all this makes him feel fragile and vulnerable. There may be people who choose to manipulate/deceive when feeling vulnerable to get what they want, however Cronenberg prefers to discuss the issue and work with the actor about what they can create with the resources they have. In a similar way, within a collaborative framework, instead of closing their minds, participants are invited to open up and share with each other everything that is relevant to the therapeutic process and space. Harlene proposes to make the internal dialogue public and reflect with the client about what happened during the interaction.

About the Safe Place

In regard to the relationship with the actors, the filmmaker emphasizes about the importance of not being punitive, allowing exploration and make it (the set) a safe place. This encourages the actor to try stuff out. Harlene talks about connecting to one's own creativity and inviting the other to connect with their own creativity. She mentions that as therapists we facilitate processes and we are responsible to generate a safe place. She goes even further when mentioning that relationships and conversations go hand in hand, that relationships inform the type of conversations we have and vice versa.

About Creativity

There is a section of the interview where he reflects about his creative decisions. He admits that he could be his own critic, capable of analyzing his whole career from beginning to end; however, he does not do that while he is making a film. He feels that it is very physical the making of a movie; if it pleases me, if it feels right then it is right... it is all intuition but is based on experience of course. This reminds me of Harlene and the therapeutic presence: being in the moment/witness and let the process itself inform the therapist. Cronenberg also explains that in that moment it is necessary to forget what was done previously and that it is important to trust in one's skills.

About Lessons Learned

I enjoy films and now that I have the opportunity to listen about the filmmaking processes, the perspectives of actors and even the deleted scenes, I find myself at times more interested in the bonus material, what happens behind the cameras and the interviews. I find the product/content attractive, but the process fascinating. Listening to professionals in other areas of knowledge that talk about the processes enables me to understand and language my experience as therapist.

Sharing the filmmaker's interview video generated comments and reflections in our group. I would like to pass on some impressions from our colleagues about Cronenberg^v. He was described as a filmmaker with a postmodern and collaborative stance, who follows, who does not impose himself, who inspires, who trusts. A wise, respectful, flexible, curious, inclusive man; a facilitator. Someone who values the experience of co-constructing an artistic work, who takes a position that does not oppress others, but allows them to contribute and benefits from collective thinking. Applied to a therapist, the attributes above would describe a collaborative stance and a way of being with the other which encourages the expertise of each participant. This is the language used to describe the work of Harlene Anderson.

This interview was an encounter with a filmmaker who co-creates with his team and it was a surprise for me that something that I am passionate about also moved my colleagues, whom with I enjoy co-constructing learning. I continue to appreciate the stance of a collaborative therapist who values the respect and art of accompanying the other with presence.

Link of the video recovered el may 19, 2012:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCKKgIqSdww&feature=youtube_gdata_player¹.

ⁱ Cinema, Literature and Writing as therapeutic tools. The program is given at Grupo Campos Elíseos in Mexico City. Grupo Campos Elíseos [GCE] is an Institute founded in 1998, focused on generating a learning community that aims to encourage individuals to work on dialogic spaces and processes to share cutting-edge ideas and practices in psychology and psychotherapy. GCE is affiliated with the Houston Galveston Institute [HGI].

ⁱⁱ Canadian filmmaker, screenwriter and actor. Some of his movies are *Crash* (1996), *Spider* (2002). In the video interview he refers to the film *A Dangerous Method* (2011), in an AFI event with host James Hosney. After the initial interview, the host opens the questions to the public, which leads Cronenberg to describe his experience as a filmmaker.

ⁱⁱⁱ Harlene Anderson is co-founder of the Houston Galveston Institute, a renowned author of books and articles which aim to spread the collaborative practices. Her latest article is "Collaborative Relationships and Dialogic Conversations: Ideas for a Relationally Responsive Practice," published on March 16th in *Family Process*.

^{iv} According to Wikipedia, the term *Found Art*– more commonly known as *found object*– describes art created from undistinguished, but often modified, objects or products that are not normally considered art, often because they already have a non-art function. The term was created by Marcel Duchamp in the early 20th century.

^v It strikes me that Cronenberg chose to talk about his experience as filmmaker precisely when being interviewed about his film *A Dangerous Method*, in which he addresses the relationship between Freud, Jung and his patient Sabina. Using his words, this particular film refers to the *conversational method* of psychotherapy. Also, the film content encourages critique and reflection about the role of the therapist in the life of the patient. I don't think it's a coincidence that Cronenberg chose to film about this topic.

Author Note:

Vanessa Manassero Baeza
Clinical Therapist
Master Degree in Family Therapy
Email: v.manassero@hotmail.com