Blindness in V Acts

Disability Studies as Critical Creative Inquiry

Devon Kathryn Healey

Doctor of Philosophy

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Social Justice Education

University of Toronto

2019

Abstract

This dissertation engages the cultural meanings and movements of blindness from a dramaturgically inflected form of critical creative inquiry. It addresses how blindness is lived in the particular contexts of its appearance — in offices of ophthalmology and psychiatry, in classrooms of higher education, in accessibility service offices, on the street and at home. My dissertation reveals the performative enactment of blindness that is lived in the public as well as in the private corners of the self, that orients to blindness as a necessary and creative feature of the sensorium, and that demonstrates how blindness is a form of perception.

Influenced by narrative inquiry, this work introduces methodological twists from theatre and drama while drawing from theorists such as Erving Goffman, Rod Michalko, and Tanya Titchkosky. This dissertation takes the form of a play and is written in five acts as a way to explicate the everyday life of blindness, its being and its feel, its ontology. Each act represents a
stage, a context, upon which the everyday life of blindness is performed. The narrative follows
the life of Erin, a young and recently blind woman. The first three acts dramatize how Erin’s
blindness is conceived of and understood in medicine, education and the street. The fourth act
turns to the self, exploring the philosophical question of blindness as an identity. The first four
acts end with a “Theoretical Intermission” where blind studies is exemplified in relation to
disability studies and phenomenology, again, with a dramaturgical twist. The fifth and final act is
written as a separate, but related, one act play dramatizing the precarious life of blindness.

This dissertation contributes to the fields of blind and disability studies, education,
cultural studies, interpretive sociology and phenomenology as well as theatre, drama and
performance studies by releasing a poetics of the eyes. This dissertation cultivates the possibility
of an interpretative relation to both blindness and sight by employing a unique methodology that
privileges blind eyes in knowledge production on the stage of everyday life.
For my oil spot

For Nate

For my parents

For Erin
Acknowledgments

The writing of this dissertation began as nothing more than a midday conversation with Rod Michalko that continued into the evening over cocktails. This conversation continued to take shape through the laughter and tears shared among my family, friends and colleagues as we all, together, began to see through blind eyes. There is nothing more precious in life than our imaginations and I want to thank those who shared theirs with me, who stirred my imagination and who, with generosity and grace, imagined blind eyes with me. It is to these people I owe an incredible debt of gratitude.

I would like to thank Drs. Megan Boler, Ann Lopez and Benjamin Whitburn for serving as members of my doctoral committee and to the Associate Dean of Programs at OISE/UT, Dr. Douglas McDougall, for his comments and editorial suggestions.

I want to especially thank Madeleine De Welles for copyediting this dissertation. Her attention to detail, the editorial beauty she brings to the pages as well as the joy of sharing an office with her made not only the final stages of writing enjoyable but the last year of my PhD a true delight. To my office partner of six years and dear friend, Leroy Baker, I also owe a special thanks. It has been an honour and privilege to have worked alongside you and to have shared in your life. Our windowless office has forged a friendship that is like no other; thank you for sharing in endless cups of coffee, bowls of soup and surprise Jamaican patties when I needed them the most. I owe a special thank you to Tracey Edelist for her friendship, support and laughter.

Words cannot express how truly grateful I am to both my supervisor, Dr. Tanya Titchkosky and my doctoral committee member, Dr. Rod Michalko. Their generosity of spirit, their guidance and their friendship made writing this dissertation not only possible but also a life-changing experience. I am forever grateful to Dr. Tanya Titchkosky who showed me the poetics, beauty and wonder in disability studies. Thank you, Tanya, for taking a chance on me, for being my supervisor, friend and, perhaps most importantly, for showing me how to re-imagine blindness and disability. I am especially indebted to Rod Michalko who spent countless hours over the phone and in-person working through ideas, editing and imagining this dissertation with
me. Thank you, Rod, for being not only my mentor and friend but also my guide into the beauty
that is blindness.

The main character of this work is named after my sister, Erin Healey. Erin is a strong,
intelligent and passionate woman who has and continues to be a constant source of love, energy,
laughter and inspiration in my life. Her presence flows through all of the pages of this
dissertation, giving the character of Erin the vivacity to embark on the journey in discovering just
how to be blind. Thank you, Erin for skipping into blindness with me—I love you. And, a very
special thank you to my brother-in-law, Keith Corkum. Your friendship, love and sense of
humour never fails to put a smile on my face—thank you for being your wonderful self. I am
deeply grateful to my grandmother, Annie Morton, who through her life with Macular
Degeneration, showed me how seeing differently is both a powerful and graceful way of being in
the world.

And, to my parents, Gerald Healey and Marylin Healey, I am especially indebted and
grateful. It is impossible to truly express how much you both mean to me. The impact that you
have had on and continue to have in my life is equally impossible to express.

Thank you, Dad, for filling my days with laughter, stories and music. My desire to find
the beauty in everyday life, to engage genuinely with others and to always be true to myself
comes from you. The creative, emotional and inquisitive way you live your life is throughout the
pages of this dissertation.

Mum, thank you for moving into blindness with me, for being blind, with me. Although
you may not see the way I do, I knew then that you were right there with me, feeling it, and still
now, I know you are in it with me.

And finally, to my partner in life, love and in blindness, Nate Bitton, this dissertation
would not have been imaginable without you. You embraced my blindness long before I ever
could. You have shown me how to be an artist, how to create and how to listen to the world in
new ways. Thank you for holding my hand, for laughing and crying with me and for being a part
of every word on every page of this dissertation. I love you.
Table of Contents

Abstract................................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication............................................................................................................................. iv

Acknowledgements.............................................................................................................. v

Table of Contents................................................................................................................ vii

PROLOGUE......................................................................................................................... xi

INTRODUCTION
........................................................................................................................................ 1

Exploring the extraordinary pathways of ordinary performances of blindness.......................... 5

The interpretations of normal variation.................................................................................. 11

Disability studies, resistance, and ontology............................................................................ 15

Blindness in V Acts................................................................................................................. 21
ACT I The Genesis of Blindness

.................................................................26

Scene I.................................................................26

Scene II...............................................................28

Scene III.............................................................31

Scene IV.............................................................36

Scene V.............................................................39

Scene VI.............................................................40

Scene VII...........................................................45

Scene VIII..........................................................51

Scene IX.............................................................55

Scene X.............................................................64

Theoretical Intermission...........................................65
ACT II: EMOTION AND THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

Scene I ......................................................................................................................74
Scene II ....................................................................................................................86
Scene III ...............................................................................................................90
Scene IV ...............................................................................................................97
Theoretical Intermission .......................................................................................105

ACT III: BLINDNESS IN THE STREET

Scene I ...............................................................................................................112
Scene II .............................................................................................................114
Scene III .............................................................................................................117
Scene IV .............................................................................................................121
Theoretical Intermission .....................................................................................125
ACT IV: AT HOME BY MYSELF WITH YOU

Scene I ..................................................................................................................132

Scene II ..................................................................................................................135

Scene III ..................................................................................................................139

Scene IV ..................................................................................................................144

Theoretical Intermission .........................................................................................146

ACT V: THE SPECTOR OF A HOME

...............................................................155

EPILOGUE ................................................................................................................190

Whose Blindness is it Anyway? ...............................................................................192

The Manyness of Blindness .....................................................................................195

The Feel of Blindness ..............................................................................................202

Reflexive Influence ...............................................................................................204

REFERENCES .......................................................................................................206
PROLOGUE

How we think of blindness follows from how we imagine it and how we reimagine it follows what we think of it. Thinking of blindness as the lack of sight means that we can close our eyes, imagine it, and suddenly know what it is; we attempt to walk around the room with eyes-wide-shut and suddenly we know how blindness feels. We imagine blindness as what we know and what we know is what we imagine.

Imagination then, both informs and is informed by routine sets of actions, look, a blind person, that illustrates beliefs, nothing to see, anyway — we and our imaginings function within a socially “pre-scripted” existence. Is blindness really what we think it to be if blindness is caught up in our pre-scripted imaginary? Perhaps we should “look into” blindness.

Looking into the pre-scripted life of blindness might reveal blindness as a doing, a choreography of actions, movements and phrases that make up a performance that both shows and tells blindness. The show and tell of blindness is not a given but rather, to borrow from Judith Butler (1997), “… is an identity tenuously constituted in time — an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (p. 402). If Butler is right and, “… the body comes to bear cultural meanings” (1997, p. 403) then blindness performs itself by performing the imaginings of what sight thinks it knows blindness to be.

There are, of course, many stories of blindness and its people in the world. I want to speak of a particularly intriguing story, The Country of the Blind by H.G. Wells (1904). This is a

---

1 This is akin to Frantz Fanon’s (1967) book Black Skin, White Masks, Chapter 5: The Fact of Blackness “Look, a Negro!” (p. 84). It does a similar kind of interactional work in relation to blindness as Fanon’s phrase does in relation to blackness.
fictional account of a country populated with blind people. Wells’ is a story that imagines a particular kind of blindness together, alone with itself, a blindness without sight. It is here, in this imaginary, where blindness not only lives but flourishes without its antithesis. This story differs from other stories of blindness since it is born from blindness itself while others are born of sight in the sense that Wells’ population of blind people came about through a genetic condition that, over the generations, made everyone in the country blind.

This is a story that draws on the understanding that eyes either see or do not. Although Wells’ story is fiction, an imagined community, the people are real. They are real insofar as blind people exist, fictional or not. Countries of the blind, in contrast, are strictly fictional. The realness of the blind people in the story, however, is imagined as if they do not exist outside of what Wells and his sighted readers imagine them to be. The author and reader imagine both a blind community and blind people whereas I imagine only a blind community. Blind people are real even as they are given life in a fictional community. This marks the problem of the ontology of blindness — real blind people imagining a community of blindness.

Before blindness became real to me, I thought I knew what it was. I closed my eyes and thought — “so this is blindness” — I was, of course, profoundly wrong. The conceptions I had of blindness only became real to me once I began to see through my blind eyes. I became aware that allowing my eyelids to fall over my eyes does not represent blindness at all. In fact, it does not represent anything other than just that, eyelids over the eyes. But, for those who do not see through blind eyes, blindness to them, is just that — a falling eyelid as a lack of sight, darkness. This either/or relation to the eye sets the stage for some contentious interactions between eyes that see, eyes that do not and eyes that are still looking. Blindness is not an open and shut case and yet, it is imagined as such. And this imaginary is very real for blind people.
Eyes open — sight; eyes shut — blindness. Eyes open with sight — active; eyes shut with blindness — inactive. This *either/or* relation to the eyes is conceived of and nurtured by our “social imaginary.” This imaginary, as I conceive it, is reminiscent of culture. Beliefs, customs, traditions, folklore and the like are produced through, in, and by stories. These stories told and retold mingle with each other, wrapping and tying themselves together, details lost or gained along the way that eventually, identifying the original story would be impossible, unimaginable even. This is our social imaginary, only the stories told and retold take shape though the social institutions that make up our everyday life.

Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs (2013) tell us that,

> Social institutions are necessarily human inventions, their particular functions are inevitably invested with symbolic meaning that makes sense of their functioning within the broader structures of society. Taking a structuralist position […] social institutions can only be understood through the organisation or network of signifiers and signified that is held within the social imaginary. (p. 369)

“Human inventions” are stories that are imagined by *us* to help create, organize and give meaning to our existence. Yet, the stories of our existence do not signify or represent the fullness of societies in which we live. The stories that are crystalized into social institutions reflect the dominant narrators, who and what they represent (signifier), and to whom they are narrating (signified). Let me illustrate.

We tell stories of the eyes every day. They are symbolic of intelligence, allowing us to *see* the point; intimacy, love at first sight; spirituality, the windows to the soul; authority and power, I can see right through you; in Western culture of truth and honesty, look me in the eyes; and of ability, I can see. It is not difficult to imagine everyday stories and thus everyday practices
that reflect such symbolic meanings. And so, in a world of sight to be seen as legitimate, sight is implied. “The social imaginary [then,] refers to the necessary as well as the dissimilatory” say Gilleard and Higgs, “and the transient as well as the permanent network of meanings that make a society a society” (p. 370). To be blind; to live blind; this is to live among a myriad of stories of blindness and of sight. It is also to live among blindness narrated and imagined as unimaginable. This unimaginable is to imagine blindness as wholly unexpected as shocking in its anticipation and as bewildering in its appearance. This is what I mean by the social imaginary — stories, whether of blindness or of sight, that imagine both what is imaginable and what is unimaginable.

Stories of eyes that see become stories of what it is to be human and this, for blind people, erases ontological potential. If, as Thomas King (2003) says, “the truth about stories is that that is all we are” (p. 2) and sighted stories are what make up our imaginary, where then does this leave blindness?

Karen Gagne (2007) takes up the work of Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter in relation to the human noting that, “our present culture’s purely biological definition of what it is to be, and therefore of what it is like to be, human” (p. 253) is limiting the potential of our social imaginary. The stories we tell become the stories we live and the stories we live become performances of values and beliefs we often did not realize we possessed. Do we really believe, as H.G. Wells wrote, “in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king?” (Wells, 1904). Do we really believe that blindness is darkness and to live with such darkness is not human? Perhaps. Still, there is always-already present in the story told the makings of a new story (subscript). This new or untold story provides the release of a poetics, an “action by which humans work to create themselves anew” (Gagne, 2007, p. 258). This sense of a poetics is how I conceive of the social
imaginary and how I exist within it . . . as a blind person. I tell the stories that sighted eyes, one or two, cannot see.

In the pages that follow, the stories of the eyes will be told, retold and engaged by blindness. As is the case of the role of eyes in any story, my blind eyes become the narrator and lead performer in this production; a journey on the path to discovering how blindness came to be imagined and how we might re-imagine its being. This journey begins with a story of my blind eyes attempting to be seen in the current social imaginary thus releasing a poetics of the eyes. Next, Erving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model will serve as an approach to understanding this “release” and how it is performed in everyday life. Experience alone cannot be the only way the being of blindness may be discovered. If it were, then eyes would not be relational, they would not depend on the insights of others. This is, of course, unimaginable since eyesight is always asking if some other eyes saw what they did. “Did you see that? Am I seeing things?”

And so, with medicine draped in the costumes of auto-ethnography, disability studies and Goffman’s dramaturgical approach, the curtain rises, revealing the stage upon which everyday life is performed. This stage has been home to many performances, influencing the ways we imagine and relate to and with each other; a stage whose front and back disappears with the movement of actors, a choreography that belies any sense of direction. Blindness will take the stage when the house lights go down and the curtain rises. Enjoy the show.
INTRODUCTION

Fundamentally, this dissertation is committed to working through the conception of blindness as a doing or, in Goffman’s (1959) terms, as a “performance” and in Butler’s (1997) terms as “performativity.” At first blush, these three ideas — doing, performance and performativity — seem the same. In some sense, this is true. Doing, performing, the idea of performativity, sound as though they are signifying the same phenomenon. But, while the three do reference a similar phenomenon, they do so from slightly different angles, or to use theatrical vocabulary, different blocking, thus providing a multi-perspective understanding of the performed phenomenon. This phenomenon is culture, everyday life and all of its features, including blindness.

First, I will explicate Butler’s version of performativity as it relates to blindness. Following this, I will demonstrate how the work of Erving Goffman provides a basis for understanding blindness not only as performance but as theatrical performance. This allows me to explore my sense of blindness as a doing, as a theatrical doing in the sense that it must be played out on the stage of everyday life and, as William Shakespeare says, “the play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king” (Act II, Scene II, 1679-1680).

As I said earlier, there is a pre-script (image/imaginary) of blindness and this script is written, for the most part, by sight; and yet, this pre-script needs to be rewritten (reimagined) into another script, the one to be acted out on the stage of life. The cast of this play are people everywhere, citizens of all places. The cast of this play includes all those who live in the midst of the absence and presence of sight, site and sights. The playwright, or, the King in Shakespeare’s terms, of this play has written this script only from the point of view of sight the King and it is the play, the style that catches the King’s conscience. But, it is the theatre of blindness that gives
sight an opportunity to examine itself and what it has written blindness to be. Where is this theatre of blindness? This is one of the questions that animates this dissertation. The theatre of blindness while particular in its location — the life of blind people — is also generally located. The life of blind people is inevitably lived in the midst of sighted others. It is this inevitability that makes the theatre of blindness so precarious both in its location and in its performance. Therefore, even though one of the animating questions of this dissertation may be, where is the theatre of blindness?, the inevitability of the journey and the search for it may be unending. And yet, as I search, as a blind woman, for this theatre, I find myself always-already in it and always-already performing. In a sense, it is the performance I explore.

As Butler (1997) says, “[t]o do, to dramatize, to reproduce, these seem to be some of the elementary structures of embodiment” (p. 404). These, too, are the “elementary structures” of the embodiment of the conventional understanding of blindness. In order to explore the structures of blindness, we must first examine what these structures, these performances, these doings, are based on. This is what I am calling the pre-script.

I begin with the premise that the fundamental structure of blindness is sight; that is the pre-script. The script of blindness is written and performed on the basis of the structure of sight\(^2\). Basically, in the theatre of everyday life, blindness is treated as the opposite of sight and, therefore, sight may be understood as the pre-script of blindness. We rarely imagine blindness as

\(^2\) David Bolt (2018) refers to this process as “ocular centrism.” He says, “If ocular centrism is thought of as the baseline of assumptions, the very foundation of the meta-narrative of blindness perhaps, then this neologism ocular normativism denotes the effect: the perpetuation of the conclusion that the supreme means of perception is necessarily visual” (p. 14). By this, Bolt is showing how all scripts, including the script of blindness, are written from the point of view (pre-script) of sight understood as not only the dominant way of knowing, but of perceiving as well. Ocular centrism, then, generates a certain kind of blindness, a “sighted-blindness,” so to speak. This script is what requires inquiry and exploration.
anything other than what we know, and even more seldomly do we question our knowledge of sight as something to be imagined. How is it that sight has been afforded the role of author, of playwright? Does sight come before blindness, did we get the order wrong, or have we taken for granted sight understood as a natural biological phenomenon and blindness as an unnatural one?

We understand sight as a given, we treat it, embody it, as a natural given that is biological, a product of itself outside of interpretation. Therefore, in order for blindness to be performed on any stage, a theatre stage, the stage of life, etc., the performance needs to embody the lack of sight. Without this, what would be performed is not blindness, but sight. Any script of blindness requires sight understood as a given, as a taken-for-granted reality, as a pre-script. The script of blindness is written and performed on the basis of the performance of the absence of sight. The presence of blindness in a conventional sense, is simultaneously nothing more and nothing less than the absence of sight.

For Erving Goffman (1959), the notion of performance goes beyond “elementary structures of embodiment,” rather it is the taken-for-granted theatre of everyday life. If Goffman is right and, “. . . life itself is a dramatically enacted thing” (p.70) then there is potential to re-imagine the pre-scripted performance of blindness as something other than what sight the King has made of it. And, what sight the King has made of blindness is, recalling Michalko (2002b), sight gone missing. The potential of blindness to enact its own drama, its own theatre of the eyes, to write its own script, as Goffman might say, allows for the discovery of a blind ontology — one that is not understood as embodied absence but as a presence that is its own. It may be true, as Goffman himself says, that “[a]ll the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify” (1959, p. 70). And so, in anticipation of perhaps specifying
the unease of what is crucial about blindness, it is with Goffman’s dramaturgical model that I intend to look into the theatrical life of blindness.

“It seems to me” says Goffman, “that the dramaturgical approach may constitute a fifth perspective, to be added to the technical, political, structural, and cultural perspectives” (1959, p. 240). This “fifth perspective” is embodied within the writings of William Shakespeare who dramatized everyday life into timeless five act plays whose characters and storylines continue to be performed on the many stages of life. This dissertation will take up the theme of Goffman and Shakespeare yielding *Blindness in V Acts*. The “fifth perspective” looks at the many ways in which blindness is enacted in everyday life since, as already mentioned, “the play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King” (Shakespeare, Act II, Scene II, 1679-1680).

One of the goals of this dissertation is to capture the conscience of the King; it is to demonstrate that the King, understood here as sight, does indeed write the script not only of itself but of blindness as well. It is to show, too, that sight is responsible and should have a conscience regarding this responsibility. With these goals as guides, this dissertation will proceed in five acts, each of which will depict a representative of the King of sight.

Capturing the conscience of the King of sight is no easy matter; it requires a method that first captures the King’s attention. This is why I choose to understand theatre and drama as themselves methods of inquiry. Together with auto-ethnography, methods in disability studies and phenomenology, I stage theatre and drama as the location of my method for capturing both the attention and the conscience of the King of sight.

---

3 Theatre and Drama understood as method, are similar to and are a part of what has come to be known as narrative inquiry (Couser, 1997, 2009, 2011; Mitchell & Snyder, 2001; Titchkosky & Michalko, 2014). My method borrows heavily from narrative inquiry, but introduces theatre and drama as a particular methodological twist based on the work of theorists such as Goffman and Butler.
And, why five acts? In some sense, it is arbitrary since representatives of sight are everywhere matching the ubiquity of the scenes of sight itself. However, I am choosing what I take to be the five more prevalent representatives of blindness in contemporary Western culture, namely, medicine, education, everyday life, the self and the philosophical question of blindness as an identity. Together, with the fact that all of Shakespeare’s plays are given to us in five acts, this is the reason for my writing *Blindness in V Acts*. Now that I have briefly discussed the overall orientation of this dissertation, let me move to a more detailed explication of my particular approach. This will involve a depiction of a blend of theory and method that will reveal the meaning and goals of my theatrical exploration of blindness.

**Exploring the Extraordinary Pathways of Ordinary Performances of Blindness**

This dissertation is, for the most part, a play, a story. Even though it is true, and even though it bears both methodological and theoretical reflections, it remains a story. It isn’t the actual event of blindness; it is a story of the event and so, it is not fiction. We each have seen this play, heard it, in one way or another, before. It is the play of blindness and, as such, it is a story that makes sense. It makes sense because it is believable and it is believable because we have heard it before; and, if we have heard it before then it has, likely, happened.

The reappearance of a happening in the form of a performance and a story becomes ordinary in that storytelling is a part of everyday life. You might be outraged by this story, astonished by its events, bewildered by its telling or find it to be quite mundane — normal even. Regardless, each of these responses and many more like them, are interpretations of events and performances that constructs the stage of everyday life. Our responses to performances and
stories are, in large part, derivative of these constructions. As Alfred Schutz (1970) puts it, “only a very small part of my knowledge of the world originates with my personal experience. The greater part is socially derived, handed down to me by my friends, my parents, my teachers and the teachers of my teachers” (Schutz & Wagner, 1970, p. 96). This knowledge derived from personal experience and from that which is handed down, is interpreted in the form of responses, some of which are banal in character such as agreement, while others are more visceral such as outrage. All responses to and interpretations of knowledge are in some ways the affect of knowledge itself. Knowledge, then, is through and through social in that it is a derivative of the ways in which we live in relation with one another including in relation to those who came before us and to those who will come after us.

Stories regarding “knowledge of the world” collected through time make up what we perceive to be expected, normal and unexpected, or not normal. Expectations and even anticipations are framed by this knowledge and are made sense of through the stories derived from it. Schutz refers to these collected stories as a “stock of knowledge” (Schutz & Wagner, 1970, p.74). He says,

Man [sic] in daily life ... finds at any given moment a stock of knowledge at hand that serves him as a scheme of interpretation of his past and present experiences, and also determines his anticipations of things to come. This stock of knowledge has its particular history. It has been constituted in and by previous experiencing activities of our consciousness, the outcome of which has now become our habitual possession. (Schutz & Wagner, 1970, p.74)

It is our “stock of knowledge” that makes the stories, including plays, sensible. For example, the contemporary understanding of blindness, one shared globally, frames it as a
medical problem. Indeed, this is the dominant way of framing blindness and it is played and
replayed on the stage of everyday life and it is a story that is told and retold on that same stage. It
is sensible. One response to the medical story of blindness is, “I should see an eye doctor,” or
“Have you seen an eye doctor?” These responses are derivative of our stock of knowledge
regarding both blindness and sight. They represent a relation not only between blindness and
sight, but also a relation among all of us who participate in everyday life. Indeed, it is a coming
together of all of us equipped with our collected and collective stock of knowledge that provides
for the sensibility of the story of blindness as a medical problem.

As I said earlier, this story may outrage us, it may make us laugh, cry — all of these
responses and all of them spring from our stock of knowledge. It is this stock of knowledge that
provides not only for the medical interpretation of blindness but for all other interpretations as
well. Conventional interpretations of blindness are very difficult to disrupt since the knowledge
we have collected about blindness and our subsequent responses to it become, as Schutz (1970)
says “habitual.” Habits, also a part of our stock of knowledge, are as we know, difficult to break.
Ironically, we can develop stories, in my case, in the form of a play that make use of our stock-
of-blindness-knowledge to disrupt that same knowledge and our “knowledge-habit.” Our stories
may be told so as to reflect the knowledge of blindness that is implicitly invoked by those
responding to it as a way to make sense of it. Hearing echoes of our stories as they are retold in a
different form may allow us to attend to the taken-for-granted character of our habitual stories.
This dissertation is written with the intent of retelling the story of blindness in the form of a play,
one that may, just may, be disruptive.

Whatever the case, I want to emphasize the power and influence that our stock of
knowledge about blindness possesses. We all operate with some definition of blindness and it is
this definition that influences and shapes our responses to it, whether we are blind or sighted. Of such definitions, Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko (2009) remind us that,

> Everyone operates with some definition of disability [blindness] whether we realize it or not. Thus, whatever else disability [blindness] is, it is something that people define, understand, and come to know and live with in particular ways. Virtually no one in contemporary Western culture is without some sense of what disability [blindness] is; thus, no one is without some thoughts or feelings about it. (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p.2)

If everyone was without a definition of blindness, there would be no blindness. And yet, we are with definitions of blindness and we have thoughts and feelings about it. For sighted others, though, these definitions, thoughts and feelings, are directed toward others — blind others. Sight allows for the understanding that while sighted others are not without thoughts and feelings of blindness, they are without blindness. This dissertation intends to point to this understanding of blindness; it intends to demonstrate that even though we might conceive of ourselves as without blindness, we are wholly with it in that we participate in the construction of its meaning and of its feel. Thus, we, all of us, blind and sighted, are actors in the theatre of blindness.

Knowledge is not the only thing that makes up our stock of knowledge about blindness, we also feel it and this emotional relation to it reflects, as Megan Boler (1999) says, “the complex dynamics of one’s lived situation” (p. 2). Our “lived situation” is made in and of a culture whose stock of knowledge tells us that blindness is not a good thing, it is not something that we typically aspire to or yearn for. Blindness is commonly understood as over there, as something belonging (embodied) to and by someone else, as something that we do not want to embody. And so, our thoughts, feelings and emotions reflect this. We avoid blindness and stay
firmly seated in the theatre of sight. We might say that sight, along with the conventional
definitions of blindness it generates, represent, to borrow from Boler, “[an] invisible conformity
to the status quo” (1999, p. 2). Understanding ourselves as without blindness is a commitment to
such a conformity, to sight as status quo. It may be that such a commitment grounds the activity
of passing as sighted. But, no one is without blindness since blindness is the antithesis of our
imagined and desired selves; it is a something that we want no part of.

“Down in front, I can’t see!” “Poor seats, bad sightlines.” Expressions such as these are
ubiquitous in our culture. They suggest that “seeing” is the privileged position of knowledge and
experience and they suggest that any obstruction to such a privilege be eradicated. In a more
serious way, blurry vision, floaters, double vision — all of these are instances of a threat to the
privileged position of sight. “Did you hear? Her brother went blind!” “Oh, no!” These
expressions show how even the news of blindness evokes a sense of horror.

In this way, blindness is not usually understood as something personal; it is something
that happens to a friend of a friend. It is a story on the news (not about us); it is an accident of
birth (not of ours); it is a patient in the hospital (not me); it is the one for whom the universal
sign of access means something (not to me); it is that woman on the street with a cane (white or
otherwise) (not me). It is disability; it is “one in seven Canadians aged fifteen years or older […]
14% of the Canadian population […] 3.8 million individuals” (Canadian Survey on Disability,
2012).

But, it is certainly not us.

We think of blindness as something so removed that when it begins to creep into our
everyday life, we pull storied-experiences from our stock of knowledge to rationalize our way
out of it. When, for example, our sight begins to change, as will likely happen as we age (even to
we respond in ordinary, even expected, everyday ways. We wear glasses that are fashionable to distract from our changing-sight, place contact lenses over our eyeballs to mask our changing-sight, share laughter about being *blind as bats* to make light of our changing-sight, and, of course the most rational thing of all, “my sight won’t change any more than it has, it will stay right here.” And, “In [each] cas[e] it is the stock of knowledge at hand that serves as the scheme of interpretation for the actually emergent experience” (Schutz & Wagner, 1970, p.75).

In this sense, sight (eyes that function “normally”), becomes the equally normal ready-at-hand way of interpreting the world. We then interpret our bodies in the world as capable of moving within a variation of normal sight (i.e. the need for glasses, contacts, etc.). “We operate within an implicit conception of a ‘normal range’ of variation or difference” say Titchkosky and Michalko, “[a] little trouble seeing or a little trouble hearing, for example, are usually thought of as normal differences; but blindness or deafness is another matter” (2009, p.5). When this normal variation understood as a “scheme of interpretation” is applied to blindness, it (blindness) is *made* into a problem, a problem belonging to that individual, a failure of that individual’s sight and not a problem or a failure of our stock of knowledge.

Our stock of knowledge remains firm, unchanged and any variation in it stems from what we emphasize when we face situations we may interpret and experience as new. Experiencing diminishing sight, whether severe or not, may be experienced as something new. Interpreting it, therefore, requires tacitly consulting our stock of knowledge and emphasizing one aspect of it over others. This gives us a way to interpret and make sense of new experiences. For example, interpreting changing-sight might lead us to emphasize the biology aspect of our stock of knowledge — thus we ask questions such as “who in our family has low-vision?” which is a way to interpret, know and make sense of blindness. And yet, much of our stock of knowledge, as
implicitly as we invoke it, may generate some mystery in the way we understand our experiences. I now turn to an exploration of the connection of embodiment and mystery.

**The Interpretations of Normal Variation**

Even though we live in our bodies, meaning we inhabit and interpret the world through the physical manifestation of our bodies (bones, flesh, etc.), our thoughts, feelings, actions and biology are, at times, a *mystery* to us (Michalko, 1998). We may live in our bodies but we do not *know* our bodies; we are told, particularly in Western society that while we experience our bodies, knowing them remains the purview of those who are expert in such knowing, e.g., biology (human and otherwise) and its derivatives — medicine with all its variations. We live in a culture of many experts and professionals, experts and professionals on *us*. Medicine, rehabilitation, counselling and education are some of the “professions” that provide us with expert ways of knowing what to expect, what is normal, and what not to expect, what is abnormal regarding our bodies. The mystery of our bodies, something we experience from time to time, is resolved or so the performance of medicine leads us to believe at least for all practical purposes.

The expected body, the one regarded as normal and natural, is the accepted body of medical experts. This expectation and acceptance constructs the body not only as normal, but as desired. The knowledge of normalcy handed down to us from experts and professionals in the theatre of medicine shapes the ways in which we interpret and interact with ourselves and others. This sense of the expected-normal creates, as Catherine Kudlick says, “environments built on the assumption that everyone is young, strong, tireless, healthy, of similar size and shape, independent, and with all physical and mental components and in perfect working order” (quoted in Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 34). This is both our expected and accepted normal. This,
too, serves to resolve mysteries in relation to the body. There is nothing mysterious about this version of normal until it becomes mysterious, until, for example, our sight changes. It is at this point, that we seek expertise not only to resolve the mystery but also to do so by performing a revival of sight on the stage of everyday life in the theatre of normalcy. Ophthalmologists, rehabilitators, accommodation experts, adaptive technology experts all work together as the stage crew of this revival performance. They bring the expert’s script to life on stage demonstrating that “changing-sight” can be adjusted too, rehabilitated, accommodated and can become “just like” normal sight… Only different. Managing the stage, lighting, building the sets and the rest is one thing; performing sight and its “normal variation” of changing-sight is another and is left to those waiting in the wings for their cue to enter. Waiting in the wings, too, is blindness — not changing-sight, but sight changed. It also is performed on the same stage and performed so that “change” is not a mystery, but is merely what is missing — sight itself… unchanged.

Blindness is the character that does not move with sight but away from it. It “stands” out onstage, visible, as the one removed, as the one alone, as the one missing, changed. Blindness is the figure onstage that does not blend-in, but that simultaneously draws the attention of sight and away from sight. Blindness is the leading role that awaits its entrance; for this, it needs one more change — from sight removed to sight missing. Removing sight may be a relatively innocent activity. Blindness simulation exercises demonstrates this. Missing sight, in contrast, is not so innocent. It is sight that should be there, but is not; it is missing. It cannot be moved back as in the case of simulation, it can only be explained. How did sight go missing is a question

---

4 For an analysis of blindness simulation and its relation to the culture of sight, see Titchkosky, Healey & Michalko (2019).
addressed by medicine in contemporary times. It is this version of blindness, missing sight, that initially takes the stage as the leading role.

But, blindness may be a diva of sorts especially one with eccentricities. These actors, this blindness, sometimes resist change. This blindness, alone in the wings, feels the vibrations from the weighted movement of sight onstage. It hears the gravitas of many voices speaking as one telling of sight as the way things are and the way things ought to be. Alone in the wings, this blindness waits for its cue. It waits for its moment to enter, for the time in the performance when sight pauses, asks a question or is silent. Blindness is the character who is constantly waiting in the midst of the performance of sight, a performance spoken as a monologue — no dialogue, no room.

But, this blindness grows restless and no longer waits patiently. With its resistance it asserts itself on stage and demands the focus, a dialogue performed on stage in the theatre of the eyes. It demands its part.

This is what happens when blindness (without resistance) enters without being called on. Pulling focus away from sight, it is soon consumed by the many images, sounds and feelings of sight — upstaged by this manyness, by the performance of sight. Blindness is not the ideal performer of sight and it is most definitely not as we like it, since it is merely like it; it performs sight, not ideally, but as a reasonable facsimile. Michalko (1998) suggests that, “the hermeneutic circle, how and what we see proceed from a community bound in the interplay of persons and tradition” (p. 74). Blindness enters in the midst of sight’s performance; it knows the plot of sight but cannot be or partake in its depiction … except in passing since passing counts as real only on Shakespeare’s stage. It is in this way that the “hermeneutic circle” of which Michalko speaks, with its community, its traditions and its people and the interplay among them get broken.
Blindness enters this community. It does not have interplay; it merely plays in the community, in its traditions and plays (posses) as one of its people.

Without resistance, though, blindness enters the hermeneutics of sight (its community, its people and their interplay) without understanding that its entrance can mark a break in this circle. This means that the quintessential problematic of blindness is its lack of self-knowledge.

Blindness only enters the theatre of the eyes (everyday life) if it can in some way support the performance of sight. It is important to note that blindness is not and will never be a member of sight, but it does support it. This is done when blindness “plays along” with the supremely ordinary plot of sight as the everyday. This playing along is how blindness has come to be known as lack, limit, tragedy, loss, resilience, exceptionality, horror, superstition, and the rest. This playing along is how blindness may insert itself into the hermeneutic circle of performance (community, people, interplay), it may not be the ideal performer but by participating in the staged-life of sight, blindness is no longer waiting in the wings; it is required onstage as a supporting role.

This playing along or passing, does little if anything to rewrite, create a new script, or even edit the performance of sight. The ontology of blindness generated from this orientation is transformed into an epistemology. The being of blindness is transformed into knowing what blindness is and knowing how it should perform (its role) in the theatre of the eyes. The epistemological plot of blindness, “seeks to teach blindness about sightedness so that it can come to know sightedness and, equally importantly, so that blindness can come to know itself as the distorted shadow of sight” (Michalko, 1998, p. 87). Blindness is inserted into the theatre of the eyes as sight’s shadow, playing along to get along.
Now that I have laid the ground for my exploration of *Blindness in V Acts*, I will say more about the perspective of disability studies that I make use of in this work. Disability studies, as opposed to the medical version of disability, allows for a more creative understanding of disability, including blindness, and its creative potential.

**Disability Studies, Resistance and Ontology**

For the most part in the contemporary West, blindness is interpreted, at least initially, from a medical perspective. Those of us who experience changing-sight, for example, experience this change in relation to something wrong with the eyes, something medically wrong. In contrast, disability studies, in response to the medical model of disability, provides for the possibility to understand and subsequently experience disability not as strictly medical in character, but also as a *being*. Disability studies, then, has allowed me to experience and explore the ontology of my blindness, my identity as blind and the various epistemological positions regarding blindness offered by my society as a solution to what it conceives of as the problem of blindness.

Disability studies treats blindness and other disabilities both in terms of ontology and epistemology. That is, disability studies’ interest in blindness centres on blindness understood as relational. It stresses the appearance of blindness in the world both that it makes an appearance and how. Its ontology, then, is understood as emanating from such an appearance and from the relations among people, traditions, structures, technologies and the rest of the trappings of culture in which such appearances occur. The difficulty with a focus on relationality in the form of the interactional appearance of blindness, is that the being of blindness is formed only interactionally, constraining the being of blindness to always-already formed in relation to sight,
and making blindness its shadow, as Michalko says. This means that a disability studies perspective on blindness must eventually depart from its appearance in the world and orient to the “it” of blindness, its being. This requires the formation of self-understanding in the sense that the appearance of blindness is more than meets the eye and it is this more that needs to be explored. Blindness, in this sense, is more than appearance. It is also the occasion to explore what appears in the midst of both its appearing and appearance. In all of its characters, including me, blindness knows itself/myself as an epistemology in relation to sight. I am blind but I do not know what it is to be blind. I know what I am but I do not know who I am (Michalko, 2002, p. 84).

This is why the quintessential problematic of blindness, and perhaps of all disability, is self-understanding. Cultivating self-understanding may be a problematic for all of us, but it takes on an especially distinct character when it comes to blindness and blind people. Thus, how do we come to understand blindness, namely our self?

Arendt (2005) tells us that, “understanding is unending and therefore cannot produce final results. It is the specifically human way of being alive” (2005, p. 308). Cultivating self-understanding, then, does not come to an end; it is “unending” and, in this sense, it is a life. “Final results” are impossible if understanding, including self-understanding, is simultaneously unending and a life. The self-understanding of blindness, what it is to be blind can never be final, it can only be lived. Cultivating self-understanding is, then, “. . . the specifically human way of being alive” to blindness.

How does disability studies contribute to blindness’ understanding of itself? Dan Goodley (2011) tells us that, “disability studies are a broad area of theory, research and practice that are antagonistic to the popular view that disability equates with personal tragedy” (p. xi).
Within this “broad area” of study, impairment, disability and their everyday appearance and experience are taken up and made to mean in different ways. Whatever frame disability studies or any form of inquiry takes will define the meaning of disability. Disability studies, in whatever way it gets done, moulds disability so that it fits its particular way of doing disability studies.

The “Social Model” of disability, for example, approaches disability as a form of oppression and “understands” impairment and disability as two separate, but related, occurrences (Davis, 1995, 1997; Finkelstein, 2001; Oliver, 1990, 1996). The impairment/disability split in the social model requires impairment to be a static non-changing phenomenon, biological in nature. Disability, in contrast, is required to be subject to the fluctuations of the society that made it. “Social model scholars turned attention away from a preoccupation with people's impairments” says Goodley (2011), “to a focus on the causes of exclusion through social, economic, political, cultural, relational and psychological barriers” (p.11). This interpretation prompts society to respond to impairment in ways that not only include impairment into society (ramps for wheelchair access, sign language interpreters and voice description) but also renders impairment strictly as something that can be attended to and possibly solved.

Disability or disablement happens when society fails to respond to or solve impairment, leaving and/or creating obstructions that prevent all persons from accessing or participating in the activities of everyday social life. While this relation to impairment seeks to remove stigma from the individual, it does not understand itself as a contribution to understanding disability as something other than society’s failure to respond appropriately. Finkelstein (2001) notes, “Sadly a lot of people have come to think of the social model of disability as if it were an explanation, definition or theory and many people use the model in a rather sterile formalistic way” (p.6). However, to separate impairment from disability as the social model does, may be read as
formalicious and may even be read as an explanation of how disability came about. This does more for the epistemology of disability than it does for its ontology. Being disabled is a different question from how one’s disability occurred.

“Affiliated scholars” Goodley says, “reject a firm distinction between impairment and disability because they view biology and culture as impinging upon one another” (2011, p.14). In this sense, impairment and disability are not separate but exist together in and of a society that works to create, explain and erase them, all at the very same time. This comes closer to the exploration of disability and ontology.

The work of Bill Hughes (2007), a disability studies scholar working from the disciplines of political philosophy and phenomenology, can assist greatly in this exploration. The activity of uncovering the ontology of blindness, and that of most disabilities, seems to be contagious. The moment disability is revealed as a distinct identity, fleeting as it is, suddenly becomes the moment everyone is disabled. This moment of sudden “unity” is underpinned by the notion that humans are inherently “frail” and “vulnerable” (Hughes, 2007, p. 680), each passing moment bringing them closer to death. This position, of course, eliminates the possibility of a disability ontology and even the possibility of minority status.

Hughes puts the matter this way, “[b]ecause disablement ‘is an intrinsic feature of the human condition’ it cannot form the basis of minority group status. Impairment, it seems, is destiny” (2007, p. 675). Hughes rejects this contagious moment as “post-enlightenment humanism in which difference disappears into the abstract and disability is eclipsed by the notion of a common humanity” (2007, p. 677). This can be understood as the expansion of the theatre of eyes where any difference is swallowed by the supremely ordinary ensemble cast of this theatre.
This “common humanity” is a common problem of disability. The commonality of blindness — we are all losing our vision; “move out of the way, I can’t see, you are making me blind.” The commonality of physical disability — we all have aches and pains; we all can’t run/walk/sit/stand all the time or as we used to. The commonality of… it’s all the same. We all experience what you do from time to time and in one way or another. And so, the ontology of blindness is cast to one side in favour of an epistemology — I know what it’s like. Hughes cautions, “If we collapse the particularities of disabled lives into the abstract concept of humanity we end up claiming that disability does not matter. It is inconsequential, superfluous in comparison to one’s generic, species status” (2007, p. 678). The effort to create a “common humanity” where, to borrow from Goodley (2011), “biology and culture” exist together in a state of friction does not lend itself to a blind ontology. The everyday “negative ontology of disability and the particularities of prejudice and oppression tend to reassert themselves” says Hughes (2007, p. 678) thus making disability an ordinary feature of everyday life. To reduce disability to such an ordinary feature is to diminish, if not eliminate, the prejudice and oppression of which he speaks. This reductionist perspective removes disability from any possible social identity to a merely ordinary feature of the essential frailty and imperfection of any human. Disability studies joins such endeavours as woman in gender studies, queer studies, black studies as a form of resistance to the common-sense understanding that “we are all human” and that “all lives matter.” Exploring the ontology of disability is crucial to this form of resistance.

---

5 See Titchkosky (2001) for a more detailed exploration of the concept of “humanity” through “person-first” language.
“Impairment is the vantage point from which disabled people see the world and how the world responds” says Hughes, “[t]heir intersubjective and inter-corporeal experience is marked, ubiquitously, by “felt” processes of socio-ontological invalidation” (2007, p. 678). It is this invalidation that separates the story of non-disability from disability and the story of sight from blindness. In theatrical terms used in this work, it is the narrow line drawn, dividing the quiet darkness of the wings from the animated spot-light of the stage. This separation is located in the knowledge that blindness is not sight and is therefore not a part of its story.

Whether we are blind or not, we know what blindness is. The knowledge we have of it is that it is missing sight, a medical problem. The ontology of blindness is another matter altogether. The “who” or the “self” of blindness cannot be gleaned through knowledge alone. Knowledge of blindness, after all, belongs to everyone. Its ontology, though, is a belonging that comes through living blindness and an imaginative engagement with this life.

But, to whom does blindness belong? It cannot belong to everyone since the “common humanity” of blindness is not felt by everyone. If it were, there would be no such commonality. This question can be engaged only in the exploration of both being blind and the being of blind, an exploration the remainder of this work embarks upon.

The intersubjective and inter-corporeal relations between disabled and non-disabled people, in Hughes’s terms, stems from the vantage point of impairment. It is the “felt” experience of impairment of disabled people and the presumptive and putative sense of impairment experienced by non-disabled people that socially define their relation. This relation generates the unity of what Hughes calls the socio-ontological invalidation. This stems from the

---

6 This sentiment may represent the beginnings of a form of inquiry we might call Blind Studies. A fuller explication of Blind Studies must wait for another time since it is beyond the scope of this work.
conventional understanding rooted in the common humanity orientation that disability is an invalid “vantage point” from which to view, understand, know and ultimately experience the world. This process is what Hughes called a socio-ontological invalidation. It is this invalidation and its connection to a sense of belonging that I will explore in the following pages.

**Blindness in V Acts**

What follows is my attempt at coming to know blindness and to understand it. I incorporate both my knowledge and understanding of blindness as it came to me through my sight and my experience as a sighted person in this exploration. This knowledge and understanding is infused with my experience of blindness. This infusion is not merely a wrinkle in my sense of what and who I am; it is more a jolt (Berger, 1963) that has shaken the foundations of my taken-for-granted sense of the world and, more dramatically, it has shaken my taken-for-granted sense of who I am. In the following pages, I attempt to make use of this jolt, this shattering of my taken-for-granted sense of sight, as an occasion to explore the version of self I am now, now that I am blind.

How blindness makes an appearance in the world, its storied life and thus being, is often defined by how the medical realm identifies and knows it to be. The **who** of blindness (self) is often identified by the **what**, the type of blindness, medical professionals diagnose it as “having.” How the blind person is then expected to behave and thus live is given to them via a medical prognosis, an outline of **how** their medical version of blindness is likely to behave. In this sense, medicine writes the character of blindness.
Act I, *The Genesis of Blindness*, depicts blindness as the ingénue. The birth, discovery and subsequent growth of this young, both in age and in days blind, character is dramatized through the eyes of Erin, an ingénue of blindness who is not satisfied with the character medicine has written her to be. This act marks the beginning of Erin’s journey in blindness and how she came to discover that blindness is more than meets the medical eye. A theoretical intermission follows this act and follows each of the next three acts. The last act, act five, is more of a creative reflection on blindness and the entire five acts are followed by a theoretically oriented epilogue.

The education of Erin, both in blindness and as a graduate student at the University of Toronto is explored in Act II, *Emotion and the School of Hard Knocks*. The identity or being of blindness is one that is heavily bureaucratized or to use theatrical terms, scripted. Blindness is not something that is simply lived; it is an identity written by medicine and as such comes with endless papers, documents, forms and files to confirm its (Erin’s) identity as blind and to contextualize its (her) performance on the stage of everyday life. In this act, the classroom is the stage upon which Erin must navigate and perform. The tension between the character of blindness written for Erin, the one students and teachers know and have come to expect from any and all blind people and the blindness Erin is discovering within herself, drives this act. This tension is neither easily transcribed into letters for accommodation from university accessibility services, nor is it one that fits easily into a box on a form to register as a disabled student. It is messy; it is emotional; it is difficult; it is humorous; it is more than a file that follows a blind person everywhere they go… it is blindness.

The character development of our blind ingénue delves into the performative qualities nurtured through our relations between self and other, blindness and sight, knowing when and
how to be one, both or neither in Act III, *Blindness in the Street*. In this act Erin is confronted with the “reality” that she is visually available to others, a reality that comes to her clearly through her blindness. The reality that Erin, and indeed all of us, is visually available to others is a reminder that her blindness gives her. It is a reminder, too, of the taken-for-granted everyday conception of sight as the way things are and the way things ought to be. Erin moves through the streets of her city, Toronto, discovering that there is a rhythm to her movements. And, she discovers that there is a rhythm to the street. How these rhythms are written, played, felt and lived is what gives this act an eerie feel through the ghostly vibrations of *sight unseen* to echo Georgina Kleege (1999).

In Act IV, *At Home By Myself With You*, the eyes of Erin turn their gaze inward to reveal the watchful presence of her constant companion. Erin’s eyes serve as both something to be watched by her and at the same time what watches her. The “you” that Erin is alone with and how she will live with such a “you” is the question of this Act and what serves as the impetus for Act V, *The Spector of a Home*.

Act IV reveals the quintessential problematic of blindness through Erin’s confession that she does not know *how to be* blind. Act V takes this philosophical question of blindness as an identity and explores its many possible answers in the form of a one act play. In this play Erin sits, precariously, atop a high bar like stool on the stage of an empty theatre, waiting. For whom or for what she is waiting becomes blurry as her wait is interrupted…

This waiting bears an uncanny resemblance to writing. When we write, including the writing of a dissertation, we are often interrupted. One of the things that interrupts us as we write are the voices with which we write. Many voices enter our writing — theorists, teachers, our
experiences and those of others and, of course, the voice of the author. These voices sometimes agree with one another and at times disagree; there is often confusion and conflict among the voices and, from time to time, even harmony.

My dissertation like all other instances of writing has several voices. There is, first of all, my voice in the form of life-writing (my experience); second, there is the voice of the narrator (my voice as theorist, and stage manager); there are the voices of the theorists, Goffman, Michalko, Butler, Titchkosky and the rest, I bring into conversation with my dissertation. There is Erin. This last voice is difficult to describe. It is not a singular voice, but a voice that embodies more than one being. There is me; my experience of blindness is folded into Erin’s voice. There is me the narrator. I narrate through the various voices that appear in this dissertation and I narrate blindness, in part, through the voice of Erin. Finally, there are the voices of blindness and sight. These two voices represent the crux of this dissertation. Blindness and sight have spoken to, with, and past one another since the first ray of light hit the retina. This dissertation attempts to, first, listen to the conversation between blindness and sight and, second, to represent it in the depiction of a theatrical portrayal of this conversation. The dialogue between blindness and sight always, in contemporary Western culture, privileges sight as the main and most legitimate interlocutor. This is because this very same dialogue refuses to listen to the voice of blindness on the basis that it is sheer distortion and, therefore, generally unintelligible. But as Titchkosky and Michalko (2014) say in their discussion of narrative inquiry,

To say anything about disability is to *tell* something of the life of disability — its meaning — and “to tell” is the Latin root-meaning of “narrative.” Disability, then, always has a narrative form; insofar as we say, do, or imagine something about disability, it is a storied life. (p. 102)
Blindness, too, is storied. It is a life and this dissertation both listens to and tells the story of blindness. It strives to make the voice of blindness intelligible in the conversation it has with sight. This is why the stage directions are far more detailed than they would be in a conventional play. The detail is representative of the voice of blindness. I write the stage directions with hyper-clarity so as to distract the audience (readers) from their own image of blindness. The voice of the stage directions act as a guide, leading the audience (readers) to the voice of blindness. In so doing, my aim is to bring the voice of blindness into its rightful place as a co-interlocutor in the conversation between blindness and sight. Or, put differently, in the conversation that is perception. Depicting this conversation or perception, is itself a confusing and, therefore, interesting conversation. For example, not only am I the narrator, theorist, author and performer in this dissertation, I am me, Devon, someone experiencing changing-sight, someone trying to understand how to be blind. I pop in and out of this dissertation, blinking as I comment on what the other voices have said. It is as though I am reading this dissertation as I am writing it and discovering things about blindness, sight and my relation to them.

This dissertation also marks my attempt at both living with blindness and carving a blind-identity out of the materials provided me by my culture and by my interpretation of the meaning of these materials. Whilst this dissertation does come to an end, my formation and understanding of a blind-identity is never ending.
ACT I

THE GENESIS OF BLINDNESS

SCENE I

SD\textsuperscript{7}: An empty stage with a single spotlight, centre, the rest is dark.

Like everything else, blindness too has a genesis; it must begin somewhere. How did this begin? Surely it began long before my eyes ever saw and then did not see, since my blindness does not mark the beginning of blindness as a discovery in the world — it certainly is not new. But at the same time, it is new for me.

Everyone has a beginning based on a beginning. Finding where this beginning begins, however, is the difficulty. It is so difficult to say where or when my blindness began. I don’t have a distinct memory of when I noticed something different about the way I saw. I have no distinct pre-blindness memory of my sight; I no longer remember what clear images look like. When I remember my sight, I see it through my blindness.

I can’t really say where I was the moment my eyes appeared to me as more blind than sighted. I don’t have a date on the calendar that marks the beginning of my blindness, no birth date to celebrate. An exact account of blindness as a birth\textsuperscript{8} is not something in my life. It has no

\textsuperscript{7} Stage Directions.

birth story per se. Still, I have a rough idea of when it began and how I came to know my eyes as ones no longer ordinary. In some ways, this sounds like a beginning, at least a sort of beginning. One of the ways my blindness begins is with me but not with me alone. In this sense, I have never been alone with my blindness nor has anyone else, for that matter. As Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko (2009) say, we, disabled people, “live in the midst of others,” (p.7) thus we live our blindness with others.

Blindness is given life in and through culture, a culture that has sight as one of its dominant epistemological as well as ontological perspectives. This was once _my_ culture, _my_ home; this is how I knew that eyes were meant to see and if they did not, there is a problem. It is from this cultural perspective that it can be said that blindness begins with sight.

Sight is not something we remember as a happening in our lives. It is just there. It is rarely something we think about having until something else happens, for example, blurry vision, double vision, and the like. We treat sight as a given, as natural, as something innate to our being. Indeed, sight comes to be understood as the world itself, as the “sighted world” Blindness makes an appearance in the world as a happening, as something that happens to sight. Blindness, then, is not something we think of as natural or given. Instead, it is thought of, as Michalko (2002b) says, “biology gone wrong” (p.91). It is something “bad” that happens to our biology that is not supposed to happen and so, we respond in a culturally appropriate way. We treat this happening as a problem. This problem, however, is not interpreted as an occasion to reflect upon the place of sight in our world. Instead, it is treated as a problem belonging to a person, specifically the one who is blind.
Blindness may be thought of as a problem of “disorganized biology” that requires attention. This attention is manifested in many ways, e.g., the person’s attention, the attention of others, of family, of friends and even of strangers on the street. And, who better to attend to disorganized biology than a medical doctor?

And yet, I did not immediately see the doctor. That would have been “a bit much,” far too dramatic far too soon in the theatre of our everyday life. That is how I felt at the time. Had I seen a doctor, I may have been interpreted as overacting, a hypochondriac, wasting the doctor’s and my time. I also felt this at the time.

My journey to the doctor was a complex one, one that is a story all its own, a beginning of a beginning rooted in an ending. My blindness began with sight; it began in a world I could look at and see; it then moved, not out of that world, but to a very different perspective of it. I looked at the world, but saw something very different from what I saw before. This is where my blindness begins.

SCENE II

SD: It is a hot mid-July afternoon. The bright blue of the sky is dotted with white clouds that look as if a cotton ball has been pulled apart and just sort of left there. The yellow, almost bright white, of the sun is directly overhead. A light warm breeze moves the leaves on the trees every now and then, their gentle rustle breaking the musical sounds of cicadas — this day feels, looks and sounds like summer. The scene begins with a young girl, seven or eight years old named Erin, standing on the sidewalk. Her back is turned to the street of semi-detached homes typical to
Scarborough, just outside the city of Toronto. She stands, alone, her head slightly cast down, she is transfixed by something on the ground.

The driveway of my grandmother’s home was large, at least it felt that way to me back then. It was smooth and jet-black. She had it painted every couple of years to ensure that it’s colour, its appearance, would not fade. When it was hot outside with the sun beating down from overhead, you could feel the driveway almost come to life, sending heat back up to the sun. If I didn’t have my shoes on, I would sometimes stand on the sidewalk for a moment or two to cool my feet — and that is the first time I ever saw it, an image that would later come to follow me wherever I looked. It was the very first time I ever saw an oil spot.

I stood on the sidewalk facing the end of my grandmother’s driveway, looking down, spellbound. I was completely transfixed by the simplicity of its beauty. I stared. The heat from the sun on the jet-black asphalt made the image appear as if it were alive, swirling like water as it moves down the drain. It captured my attention.

I had never seen such bright colours on the ground before, or anywhere else for that matter. The swirls moved like a tornado, each circle a different colour, each colour its own little tornado of movement. The outer rim was a neon bright blue and it shimmered — this caught my eye first. I stood, watching the warmth of the blue shimmer and swirl into a hot pink. This pink, oh this pink spoke to me! It was playful and fun, the little stones on the driveway were highlighted by this pink, and they offered depth and texture to the image. The hot pink seemed inviting, almost beckoning me to have a closer look.

SD: Erin moves a bit closer to the image on the driveway, she bends over, her arms straight, hands pressed against her knees for support, she hovers, closer.
Then, as if out of nowhere, a burst of orangey almost yellowish shimmer stole my eyes from the hot pink. The colours seemed as if they were competing for my gaze — fighting to take my eyesight away from the other layers of the tornado, away from me, from my control, and all for itself, as if for its own amusement. How funny I thought this was, to have colours fight for my attention, the focus of my eyesight as the purpose of their existence.

SD: Erin squats down, her head resting in her hands, elbows pressed atop her knees — she looks as though she is about to dive into the oil spot.

My world disappeared into the geometric shapes of the oil spot. The longer I stared, the more I saw — flashes of green in the shiny rainbow and even shapes emerged in and through the colours until the shade of late afternoon moved in and the strength and heat of the sun no longer fed the oil. The driveway was cooling down and the swirling colours of the oil spot were not quite as bright and alive.

SD: Erin looks up to the sky, the sun has moved, the driveway is now in complete shade, now sitting on the sidewalk. She leans back, her arms behind her, hands on the ground.

How nice it would be to have a rainbow with you wherever you go, I thought. How nice it would be to have an oil spot to stare into at any time, something to entertain you and to make the world disappear.

SD: The side door of the house opens, it looks onto the driveway, a voice yells,

“Come on in and get cleaned up for dinner!”
SD: Erin jumps up and is about to run across the driveway over the oil spot when she is interrupted.

“… and don’t walk through the oil — you’ll get it all over your feet and bring it in the house!”

SD: Erin laughs.

“Maybe that’s how I’ll bring the rainbow with me…”

SD: She runs toward the door; we do not see whether she ran through the oil spot.

SCENE III

SD: A rainbow of coloured lights illuminates an empty stage. There is a centre spotlight of blue, pink, yellow and green that rotates at no particular speed. There is one lonely figure on stage, not a seven or eight-year-old girl, but a woman in her early twenties. It is Erin. She stands stage left, looking — not staring — but looking at the moving rainbow lights centre. She is standing, alone, almost at attention, looking, watching the lights as they move.

This was not the oil spot she remembered from her grandmother’s driveway. She knew what that was and where it came from and what it would do — it would mess up the house. But now, she was alone with it. Looking. It had a familiar look that she recognized, but this, this came with a very different feel. What this was, where it came from and what it could do, what it would do was unclear.
I don’t know how long blindness had been with me before I noticed its presence. I’m sure it began with just a speck, a droplet of blindness the way of drop of oil grows into a spot. I suppose it began with a feeling rather than a noticing of something different. It was a feeling of difference that hinted at something.

The ease of simply shifting one’s gaze, the unconscious skilled mastery of controlled eye muscle movement to look and then have one’s head follow in such a way that prevents any motion sickness, dizziness or distortion of the image suddenly felt different. The way in which my body interacted with the world, the way I moved as I looked, was no longer unconscious. Before I ever saw my blindness, I felt it.

Strange as it seems to me now, I would shift my ribcage forward allowing my eyes to focus on an image, bringing them (my eyes and the image) closer so that I could capture the details that I knew were there. Text on a poster, a price tag hanging from a sweater, the keys of my laptop, handwritten notes — each required the movement of my upper body bringing my eyes closer so that I could see. I began using my neck muscles to support the dropped weight of my head as I hovered over images to see. The new physicality of my sight, almost an intersection of sight and my body, brought with it muscle pain, neck cramps and even muscle spasms. My muscles felt tight and strained. I was unusually tired at the end of the day but my sight, ironically, my creeping blindness was not yet something I noticed. I was just a bit more tired. I attempted to correct, what I had interpreted, as neglectful posture; sit up straight became my mantra, squinting, my new habit.

Earlier, I was instinctually, almost automatically, moving my body in order to see. Now, everything automatic was gone. I was becoming aware of a connection between moving my
body and seeing. I didn’t know that it was the presence of my blindness that I was now noticing. It was something, though.

Correcting my posture by sitting up straight provided some relief for my neck muscles. I was more at home in my body when my spine was aligned. But this “homey” feeling did not align with how I needed my body to interact with the space around me. This new body alignment, however, did not allow me to “work from home,” from in my body. I couldn’t use my body in the ways I needed too and feel the comfort of home that an aligned spine offered. Moving my body to bridge the gap between what was out there to be seen and how I could see it became a strain on more than my eyes, and so, I adjusted.

Sitting up straight simultaneously caused my face muscles to tighten around my eyes. This tightening spread to my eyelids, they too contracted, almost closing, leaving only a thin vertical sliver of vision. This worked! Squinting my eyes allowed me to sit up straight and be “at home” in my body. Initially, I thought my “problem” was muscular and squinting solved it. What I was actually doing, how squinting really served my body, was not yet something I noticed.

Still, I was curious as to why squinting helped me focus my gaze. So, I did what many in my age group do — I Googled it. Google told me that squinting changed the shape of the lens of my eye. This allowed me to focus on an image and to see it. I used my body to manipulate the world around me, shutting out unnecessary light, focusing by squinting. I could, for a short period of time, control the ways in which the world and its images came to me. In retrospect, I seemed to act as my own ophthalmologist and optometrist.

At that point, my body was accommodating me. Somehow, my body knew that my eyes were changing. How it new, I am still not sure. But, my body did move in order to adjust to my
changing eyes even though I made sense of the sensation of my body’s movement differently from its connection to my eyes. I made sense of a sore neck by evoking laziness. I was too lazy to keep good posture and leaned forward causing sore neck muscles. My body, though, leaned forward to allow my eyes to see. Then, squinting; my body squinted so that I could see, a squinting that caused facial muscle tension. It is in this sense that my body knew about my changing eyes before I did. Strange as it seems, I was not aware that my eyesight was changing. There was something changing, but I did not attribute it to my eyes.

My taken-for-granted relationship to my body and space, to the world in which I existed, however, turned out to have an expiry date. My eyes, like my neck muscles, began to ache and my face appeared different. People around me asked if I was tired or if I had a cold, saying my eyes looked heavy and full of water. Others often see us in ways we do not see ourselves. Yet, it wasn’t my blindness that they were seeing but rather my strained performance of seeing.

I was working a little too hard to see and others noticed. Perhaps I didn’t notice since I was working hard at seeing. I didn’t notice, for example, how close I held a book to my eyes in order to read it, others did, though. Perhaps the presence of creeping blindness changed the way I noticed seeing. My body did notice the creeping blindness, it adjusted to it, after all. I, in contrast, noticed only my bodies adjustment. What I came to notice was the connection between the body and seeing. The body makes seeing physical, an embodied act of movement that seeks to close the distance between the eye and the world⁹.

____________________

⁹ Howes (1991) calls this process “the distance sense.”
It seemed as if I had forgotten how eyes worked. After all, seeing is an act of interpretation. As the distance sense, sight brings the world to us. It is not as distant and the world is now a part of who we are. But, as my eyes changed, my body moved me to the world. The world remained distant. It was as if the world was evading me. My distance sense no longer brought the world to me. Instead, my body moved me to the world. It was this movement, not creeping blindness, that I began to notice.

In this sense, I noticed my sight before I noticed my blindness. When my physicality of sight became something not just felt by me but something that others noticed, it was not blindness that was being felt or noticed, it was sight. More specifically, what was being felt and noticed was that something was happening to my sight. But before the obvious could be acted upon, before getting glasses, I saw something.

What I saw was kind of familiar but its presence was inappropriate. It was there and yet it should not have been. I recognized it, I could describe it, but I couldn’t place it. It is not that it was in front of me. I wasn’t so much looking at it but in a way, looking with it, almost through it. I couldn’t touch it but it touched everything I looked at.

It distracted me; it captured my attention; it fought for my focus. I felt it, as if it were crawling on my skin, running through my veins and attaching itself to my bones. I retreated into my body, scanning every inch of myself trying to locate what I saw. It was my constant companion eyes open or shut; it made me question what I saw and even what I knew; it infiltrated my memories, incorporating itself into my past. It shaped my imagination and followed me into my future; it was a type of beauty that was unattractive, an unpredictable
energy that swirled inside. It was smooth in its destruction and visible in its invisibility. It inhabited me and I it.

What I saw had been with me long before I ever noticed it. I wonder, now, if I noticed it or if it made itself noticeable to me? That oil spot from so many years ago had found its way back. It didn’t get into the house, as my grandmother feared, it got into me. The first time I saw an oil spot was on the driveway of my grandmother’s house. Now, it is in me. Now when I look, I see that oil spot, or maybe it’s a different one. This is my blindness.

SCENE IV

SD: Soft white lights slowly fade up illuminating a doctor’s waiting room. There is a large “L” shaped desk angled toward the audience stage left. The long part of the desk is covered with stacks of files. On the smaller part of the desk that faces the audience there is a phone and computer as well as several loose leaf papers covering any possible glimpse of what the desktop actually looks like. A receptionist sits behind the computer typing. To the left of the desk there is a door.

Seven chairs are arranged in a horseshoe shape stage right. Two small tables with magazines atop of them are squeezed between the chairs. There are four people of varying ages sitting, waiting. One person sits with a white cane neatly folded on their lap; another has a guide dog lying at their feet; one person sits, elbows resting on their knees as they hold their phone in front of their face; another is reading a magazine. Beside them Erin is the fifth person waiting. She sits, taking in the room and each of its inhabitants.
We do not go to see the doctor unless we notice something unusual, something wrong or even something “abnormal.” Of course, such a noticing is not always simple; it may take time and we may interpret changes as merely random or temporary. My blindness took its time. It was a difference; I noticed something different. I was seeing, but differently, and this difference took its time. It creeped, painstakingly slowly, into my eyes. But from where, I wasn’t sure. It seemed as though it crept from my sight. I was seeing, but it wasn’t the same. By the time I noticed it, it had snuck up on me; it took over the centre of my vision. It’s a little eerie to “see” how blindness can be so full of sights. It never occurred to me that blindness could be sight. Maybe it didn’t occur to me because this sight was exclusively mine. And, when something such as eyesight, a sense that is culturally understood as a shared way of perceiving and even interpreting the world, is filled with sights that only you can see — we come to recognize this difference as a problem.

Problems seeing and/or problematic sights usually bring people to an ophthalmologist’s waiting room. As I sat, waiting, I knew the oil spot was mine. It was in me but the others? Were they seeing oil spots too? I didn’t think so. The oil spot was mine. What the other people in the waiting room saw or were seeing, I had no idea.

It is one thing to notice an oil spot in yourself but to be in a room surrounded by other people who may have noticed something different, suddenly it, my creeping blindness, felt as if it were everywhere. For some reason, I didn’t find comfort in numbers. I looked at the people in the waiting room and wondered what they were seeing. Were they seeing oil spots of their own, or something different? Was blindness something that customized itself to each individual person based on who they were? If it did, how did I get the oil spot? The more I thought about my oil spot the more active it seemed to get. The colours swirled, fighting for my attention. I shut my eyes, squeezing them together. I suppose I thought that this would erase the oil spot from my
vision or at the very least calm it down the way the shade of late afternoon had done to the oil spot on my grandmother’s driveway. It didn’t.

*SD:* Erin grows restless, her movements disturbing the quiet and controlled feel of the waiting room.

The feeling of creeping blindness was disturbing my wait as I sat in the room. I grabbed a magazine to occupy my eyes.

*SD:* Erin rests the magazine on her lap and opens it, she pauses, looks at the page then looks around the room. She appears a bit embarrassed as she mumbles.

“Right, forgot about that —”

*SD:* She closes the magazine and places it on the table.

In moments such as these, casually grabbing a magazine, the taken-for-granted habits, the seemingly instinctive movements of our everyday-seeing-life reveal themselves. How strange it is, to find yourself in the waiting room of an eye doctor’s office because you can’t see the way you should or once had and for some reason you expect to be able to magically pick up a magazine and read it. I suppose, looking back now, it is sort of funny.

I am not too sure what I expected as I sat in the waiting room. What I expected to happen, what I expected of myself or from the doctor. I was just there, waiting.

*SD:* The door beside the reception desk opens, a man in a dress shirt and tie holding a large file exits followed by a man with a white cane. They pause at the desk, the man holding the file is the doctor, he passes the file to the receptionist.
“No changes, make the next appointment for a year from now.”

*SD:* The doctor places his hand on the man’s shoulder.

“See you next year.”

*SD:* The doctor turns to walk away when the man says,

“Not if I see you first!”

*SD:* They laugh. The man with the cane exits. The receptionist stands up, looks at a file and calls a name. Erin watches as the patient with the guide dog walks to the examination room. The door closes and the receptionist returns to their seat. Erin stares at the door and then slowly around the room.

If doctors are supposed to make you “better,” and this is an eye doctor’s office, right now, things don’t look so good. We do not go to see the doctor unless we notice something and that noticing is not always simple. Sometimes, it takes it’s time. And yet, it’s not unreasonable to see a doctor and assume that they will be able to identify what you have “noticed as difference” and, in some way or another, provide some aid in no time at all. That is after all their purpose, or, perhaps only for some.

SCENE V

*SD:* The door of the doctor’s examination room opens. Erin’s head jerks, almost simultaneously, from her thoughts to the sound of the door opening. She stares. This is it. She realizes she is next. Her eyes quickly scan the room and then return to the examination room door. The doctor, same as before, hands the file to the receptionist. Light banter between the three, like before, only this
time, it’s a different patient. Erin stares. She is next. The waiting room goes silent, at least it does to her. They are talking but she doesn’t hear them. She is next. She is next. I am next. I am next, she realizes. Erin’s breathing quickens. What she is experiencing is not a panic attack, but a sudden rush of adrenalin. She stares. The patient exits, same as before. The receptionist stands, same as before. The doctor is waiting; they must have called her name. Here is the difference. Unlike before, it’s her turn. This has never happened before—to her, this is new. She is next—she is now—her appointment is now. Her name is called again followed by a smile and a gesture from the receptionist as if to say, “Come on down!” A rush of adrenalin suddenly explodes in her body, moving through her veins reaching every nook, cranny and nerve ending. Now is her appointment... “Come on down!” Now... Erin springs up from her seat —

“Hi...”

SD: Blackout.

SCENE VI

SD: The stage is in complete darkness.

“Keep your eyes closed for one more second. I am just turning the lights back on, so it may be a bit bright. Okay, whenever you’re ready.”

SD: Erin opens her eyes — white lights at full illuminate the stage and then quickly finds a softness. She sits, centre, in a tall almost throne-like chair. There is a small lip at the bottom of the chair that serves as a step up to the seat and then also as a footrest.
She is sitting in this chair, feet comfortably on the footrest. Her forearms and hands are resting on the arms of the beige faux leather chair. She looks comfortable, but her hands belie this appearance. Her fingernails are digging into the faux leather as though threatening it.

She looks around the examination room. There is a counter that runs along the perimeter of the room. Her eyes follow its path. Her eyes widen as she notices, what appears to her, a host of medical-like instruments on this counter. She begins to imagine the different uses for each instrument and how she would respond if they were to be used on her. Each medical instrument a different scene, each garnering a different reaction to a different eye problem. She looks intently at each one, ranking them in her order of preference. Some, she decides, are “routine instruments” used on everyone and so if the doctor picks them, she will know things are going to be fine — great, even. Others take on a different meaning, their look more curious, suggesting an intensity — these are for big eye problems, rarely used instruments for rare eyes. If the doctor were to use one of these — her mind begins to race — how would she respond? What would she do? Erin begins imagining how she might behave if one of these rare instruments is used on her. Her posture in the chair stiffness, looking as if she is sitting at the top of a rollercoaster about to drop, when something breaks her focus.

She turns toward a sound. It is typing. The doctor is sitting on a low stool typing on a computer. Her eyes open even wider when she notices that the stool is moving slightly from side to side as the doctor types. Is he teetering on the same edge as she is, about to drop she wonders? She breathes a sigh of relief and her eyes return to their normal size when she realizes the stool is on wheels. She takes a deep breath and regains control of her appearance. She doesn’t want the doctor to know that she is anything other than a normal patient — just routine instruments needed.
Except for Erin’s fingernails burying themselves in the arm of the chair and her eyes changing size at what she notices in the examination room, she appears relaxed.

What is interesting, and even funny, is that when we go to the doctor, we often express relaxation despite some level of anxiety. Emotions seem to orient medical appointments. We are anxious; we want to find out what is wrong; we would like the news to be good; we want a routine “easy fix” for what might be wrong. Even though we are at a medical appointment for a reason — there must be something bothering us — we often evoke emotions that contradict the sense that something is bothering us enough to make a medical appointment.

SD: The doctor stops typing. He turns on his stool and faces Erin smiling brightly on her throne.

“How are you doing?”

“Great!”

Great. This is an interesting response when the doctor asks how we are doing. Clearly, in some sense we are not great since, if we were, we would likely not be at the doctor’s office. And yet, great; we say we are great. The doctor, too, often participates in this form of courtesy. The doctor, for example, may say “good” in response to the patient’s “great.”

SD: The doctor rolls over on his stool to Erin, still smiling.

“Okay, tilt your head back please. You’re doing great, just great.”

SD: He holds his right hand over Erin’s face and puts eye drops into both of her eyes. Then, with a tissue, he wipes the excess that runs down her cheeks.

“You’re doing great.”
“Oh, thanks!”

SD: Erin continues smiling as she dabs her eyes with the tissue the doctor has placed in her right hand.

It is clear, in this context, that “great” is not a descriptor of the patient’s feelings. We do not typically feel great at a medical appointment nor does the doctor think we are feeling great. What is great is that we are at the doctor; we are “checking out” an experience, an experience of something different, of something wrong. It is great to “check things out,” it is even encouraged by the medical community with “annual check-ups.” Checking out a problem and checking up to find out if everything is “normal” are all “great” medical practices. But checking out and up on things may not always turn out “great.”

We want medical appointments to turn out great, but our emotions often harbour an expectation that they will not. The two, wanting and expecting, commingle as we enter the realm of medicine. Wanting and expecting are experienced as feelings, as emotions, as affect as we sit waiting in the medical realm’s version of “wait your turn to see the doctor.” We sit and wait and we are accompanied by sometimes one, at other times many cultural scripts that depict the results of what we want and what we expect.

In my case, what I wanted was for whatever was wrong with my eyes to be a routine issue, a problem corrected with glasses or even contact lenses. That was it, that was all that was necessary; an easy fix. At the same time the scrips of expectation went through my mind, always it begins with, “what if, what then?” The curious presence of medical-looking instruments haunted my desire to be a quick fix but, deep down I expected something else. I wanted the familiar but expected the unknown.
I thought that if I portrayed the ease of a familiar patient then my behaviour would trick my expectation into becoming what I wanted. I wanted to look, feel and behave in a way that was perceived to be “great” so that in the end, all would be. But, the time spent in the waiting room, the medical-looking instruments and the constant typing of the doctor (what was he typing?) interrupted my focus. What if all was not great? I pushed this haunting presence from my thoughts to my fingernails and into the arms of the examination chair.

“Look straight ahead and keep still. Great, now follow my finger with your eyes.”

SD: The stage is dark except for the light from the computer screen. The doctor rolls on his stool back to his computer and begins typing. He pauses, then reaches over to grab one of the instruments on the counter. Erin is following the doctor’s movements. She leans forward in the chair. What instrument is he reaching for, the routine checkup one or the rarely used problem tool? She blinks her eyes in a fast flutter and then opens them as wide as she can — the drops! The eye drops the doctor had put in earlier has distorted her vision, she can’t make out what instrument the doctor has chosen!

He rolls over to the Erin. He doesn’t notice that she is leaning forward. Startled — they both notice each other.

“Oh, sorry!”

SD: They both exclaim almost simultaneously. Erin blurts out, attempting to gage the severity of the instrument and thus the scene at play,
“What does that do?”

SD: The doctor holds what appears to Erin to be a rectangle glass crystal in his left hand and a magnifying glass on a stick with a light at the top in his right.

“Oh, (SD: Cutting off her question) look straight ahead please.”

SD: The doctor holds the magnifying glass on a stick up to Erin’s face with the light on the top pointing at her eye. He then holds the crystal up between the magnifying glass and her eye, he pauses holding it still, then removes the crystal, pauses, and repeats this choreography.

“— just something I use, (SD: The doctor says, bringing her question back) to see into your eyes — keep looking straight ahead please — great.”

The patient is often kept in the dark, sometimes both literally and figuratively, when it comes to the diagnostic process. The reason for this is not always clear to the patient, but seems to always be so to the doctor. It is as though the doctor’s diagnostic process belongs to her/him and not to the patient. Whether or not this is the case, may not be relevant to the diagnosis but is relevant to doctor/patient interaction.

SCENE VII

SD: The doctor sits on his stool opposite Erin, he looks frazzled. He removes his glasses with his left hand and wipes his eyes with the right. The counter behind him suggests that this is not one of his routine appointments. The once neat and organized medical-looking instruments are spread out, some piled on each other, suggesting that each were selected with haste and then discarded in frustration.
“Tell me again, *(SD: Slight annoyance in his voice)* what it is you’re seeing?”

*SD: Erin, maintaining her polite and chipper demeanour albeit a bit fatigued, attempts to bolster the doctor’s attitude and relieve his frustration.*

“I know, it sounds weird.”

*SD: Erin chuckles, smiling at the doctor. He does not return this gesture.*

“Okay, um, you know how oil from a car can leave like a stain or a spot on the driveway?”

*SD: The doctor nods.*

“And, if it's sunny out, how it can look kind of like a rainbow?”

*SD: The doctor nods again, his face stoic and focused.*

“Okay, and you know how if you turn your TV on and go to channel one, how it goes all grey and fuzzy?

*SD: Erin’s polite conversational tone begins to lessen, the doctor is giving her nothing in return.*

“Well, layer those two images on top of one another and you’ve got my central vision.

Oh, and sometimes it’s like really active, like swirling around and stuff and then other times it’s just a perfect oil spot in the sun.”
SD: The doctor rolls back to the computer and begins typing once more. Erin sits, she is not looking around the room nor is she trying to fill the silence, she is just sitting, staring off into her oil spot, the one the doctor can’t seem to imagine. She is tired. Tired of trying to appear happy, tired of attempting to make the doctor like her, tired of trying to ignore the routine appointment disappearing, tired of expecting and wanting and knowing nothing. The doctor types and she waits, staring at the reason that she is here, the reason for her fatigue, the subject of the doctor’s typing. Staring, her blindness creeps, the doctor types and she waits.

“Okay, (SD: His voice booms) I just want to see one last thing.”

SD: Erin, startled, breaks from her oil spot and collects herself, one last thing the doctor said, she can do this, one last thing — she turns to face the doctor and forces a smile. The doctor reaches for a drawer under the counter. Erin’s eyes widen once more, what was this? She hadn’t noticed a drawer! She did not prepare for this. Her shock and immediate worry is reflected in her posture as she sits. Hands crossed in her lap, she sits erect, muscles stiffen, staring at the drawer, she looks nervous, once again feeling as though she is atop a rollercoaster about to drop. The doctor removes a book from the drawer and rolls back to Erin and opens it in front of her.

“Alright, look at this page and tell me what you see.”

“Ummm. Okay, I see a circle. And, inside the circle I see a bunch of little red and green dots. They kind of look like a blood cell under a microscope.”

“Do you see anything in the circle? Can you make out an image?”
SD: Erin shakes her head no. The doctor turns the page.

“What about now?”

“No. I mean, the dots are bigger but other than that…”

SD: The doctor turns the page a bit aggressively.

“What about now?”

“No.”

“Focus. I need you to look, tell me what you see.”

“I don’t see anything, just dots.”

“Take your time and focus. What. Do. You. See?”

SD: Both the doctor and Erin appear agitated. They are no longer playing the routine roles of doctor and patient. Something has changed. They are no longer careful and controlled.

“I told you, I don’t see anything. Am I supposed to be seeing something?”

“I need to be sure. Just focus and tell me what you see?”

“Nothing! You tell me what I am supposed to be seeing and then maybe —”

“— An image! Stare at the red and green dots, is there an image that appears?”

“I’m supposed to see an image?”

“Just tell me what you see.”
“Nothing. I don’t see anything. Just red and green dots.”

SD: The doctor looks into the eyes of Erin for the last time. He closes the book and returns to his computer and types once more. Erin turns to the doctor, his back is turned to her.

“What was I supposed to see? In the red and green dots, what was I supposed to make out?”

SD: The doctor continues typing.

“Like a picture? Am I supposed to see a picture?

SD: The sound of typing.

“Well, can I look again? Maybe I will see a picture this time…”

SD: The doctor stops typing. He takes a deep breath.

“I think you need an MRI.”

SD: Silence.

“Why? Is it because I didn’t see a picture? If I could just have another look at the book then maybe —”

SD: The doctor turns on his stool, stands and walks toward the door.

“I’m afraid it’s everything, not just the book. You really need an MRI and then I will know for sure.”
SD: The doctor opens the door and walks toward the reception area. Erin springs up from the examination chair and follows him.

“Send a requisition form to the hospital for an MRI — no charge for the appointment —”

SD: Erin interrupts the doctor and the receptionist, the three of them now standing in front of all the waiting patients.

“Um, excuse me, sorry but I don’t understand. Why do I have to get an MRI?”

SD: The doctor turns to face Erin, his eyes down, focused on her file.

“I believe that your problem is neurological but I need to be sure. The hospital will contact you with the date of your MRI, I’ll know for sure then.”

SD: He walks back into the examination room and shuts the door behind him.

“Neurological” (SD: She repeats to herself.)

“Ah, excuse me, I just need your phone number. For the form…”

SD: The receptionist is now looking at Erin, waiting.

“Oh, yeah, right…”

SD: Erin pauses and looks around the waiting room. It is filled with people, waiting as before, only now she is being watched, she is now the exiting patient. Except this is not how things were supposed to go. The other patients she watched enjoyed light banter with the doctor as they left,
their appointments booked for the following year. But this was different. This was not what she wanted nor was it something she had expected.

“Your phone number?”

SD: The receptionist repeats growing impatient.

Blackout.

SCENE VIII

SD: Erin stands alone on the stage, centre, illuminated by a spotlight. The faint noise of “office sounds” play — phones ringing, people talking, doors opening and closing, etc. The noise level increases as the scene progresses. As Erin speaks, the chorus emerge from the wings carrying with them props and set pieces. As they move silently around her, an office begins to take shape from the props and furniture they once held. The chorus is quick and precise taking no notice of Erin and she takes no notice of them.

I imagine a time when I am no longer material, no longer an object — an object researched, examined, probed, corrected, remedied, pitied, laughed at, romanticised. I imagine a time when my words are not feverishly transcribed into the professional “chicken scratch” that only they can decipher; my words; my stories and yet, somehow… theirs.

SD: The noise level of the “office sounds” is steadily increasing. The chorus has finished dressing the set and have collected themselves in a horseshoe around Erin. One of the chorus members reaches out and grabs her arm. She is then “tossed” from one chorus member to another and guided toward a chair in the office. The “tossing,” almost interpretive dance like
movement, intensifies in both tempo and style. The noise of the office sounds is now at full. Once Erin is seated the noise abruptly stops and the chorus disperses and moves off stage.

“We are totally paperless now! Switching to all online files!”

“Fantastic!” I say, as if it actually matters. As if going paperless would in any way affect me. It was for them, so they could manage my words better, so they could share and discuss — so they would know. Not me, it wasn’t for me.

The chair was high and sturdy, like a throne in the room. They do their work; ophthalmologists examine you when you are sitting on the throne. I waited. The clinical grade faux leather upholstery stuck to the back of my legs, I gently lifted one leg, trying to gain some comfort. The door opened…

SD: The doctor enters.

I had been waiting for this moment, for months, weeks, days, hours now waiting, wanting to know, wanting to know more — waiting. But, they go first; they always go first.

“Tell me, how are your eyes?” How are my eyes? What sort of question is that? How are my eyes? “Not great.” This, of course, is not the answer he was looking for. How are my eyes? Better question — how am I to answer such a question? How does anyone answer this question? He is the doctor.

SD: Erin chuckles to herself.
What an irony. I am here for answers from him. I should be asking him the questions: “Tell me, how are my eyes?” I am here for him to answer that question not the other way around. Still, he wants to know “how are my eyes?”

*Their* want is never waited on, they get right to it, without hesitation. I tell them everything. I know I don’t have to, but I do it anyway, because maybe that will make them like me. I answer in the most polite, cheerful way I know. I need them to like me, because if they like me then maybe I can ask a few questions, maybe I can know too. But if they don’t like me…

“You look great — but take that with a grain of salt from me!” They laugh, so I laugh. This is currency, patient to doctor currency, cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). If they like you then maybe that will buy you more time, maybe *they* will spend a little more time with you, answer a few questions, let you in on the know. I tell them everything. He types, they are paperless now — fantastic — I give them everything. Take it, do with it what you will. At this point, Thomas King’s (2003) admonition comes to mind:

Take [my] story, for instance. It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry, forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story.

You’ve heard it now. (p. 119)

Take my eyes. They are yours. Do with them what you will. Look at them. Research them, write about them. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have done things differently if only you had seen my eyes. You’ve seen them now. *Now,* can I ask a question? Can I have a minute to know, *now*?
I need to be careful with this, it is a delicate dance, one move too soon and you can put them right off and poof, out the door, gone, no “see you next year.” Too late and then they have control, no room to interject. I was just wondering... Not on their watch you don’t. You don’t get to wonder, leave that to them. Now. Do it now! “Doctor, before you go, I was just wondering…”

“I don’t think giving you more information is good for you.”

The doctor spoke these words about me while looking at my mother who was sitting in the corner of the room, writing-pad in hand just in case I forget anything.

“How does she have any hobbies?”

I was sitting right there. All 28 years wrapped up into me, the patient, there right there on that throne, and he was asking my mother?

“She is very busy,” my mum politely responded, searching for an answer to a ridiculous question. “She is in the first year of her PhD at the University of Toronto,” as if this were a hobby. How would you answer this question? How would any parent answer this question? Marylin, my mother, answering the doctor. “Does she have any hobbies?” Not merely her daughter, her adult daughter — hobbies — does she have any? She is an adult. More than this, she is blind. What do blind people do? “Hobbies?” Certainly nothing important, not a PhD at the University of Toronto. Marylin, a parent — her daughter is busy, but not merely at hobbies, her daughter is busy doing important things, a PhD. Do ophthalmologists, like everyone else, think blind people can’t do important things, like everyone else? Marylin detects, like parents might, an awkwardness in this situation — a doctor, a patient (her daughter) and her. Now, she is asked by the dominant and most powerful one in this triad to speak on her daughter’s behalf. She could
say: “Hobbies? Ask her.” But, she is speaking to the power in the room and this is difficult to say. So, say something intelligent, sound intelligent. “Important things” my daughter is busy doing important things, a “PhD at the University of Toronto.” Is that a hobby?

And this is how I ended up here, at the psychiatrist. The ophthalmologist referred me here.

The ophthalmologist didn’t think it was healthy for me to ask questions. It would be a good idea, he thought, for me to talk to you. After all you are a psychiatrist and, more importantly, you are blind, low-vision “just like me.” You’re successful so maybe I could be. I am doing a PhD; the ophthalmologist knows this, my mother told him. And yet, he thought I should “see” a psychiatrist and a blind one at that. Blind people need more than ophthalmological help, according to ophthalmologists.

SCENE IX

SD: Erin sits alone on the stage, centre, illuminated by a spotlight. Like in Scene VIII, the faint noise of “office sounds” play — phones ringing, people talking, doors opening and closing, etc. As Erin speaks, the chorus, like before, emerge from the wings. Their actions reflect her description of the office, adding props and changing the details of the set. They move silently around her, they are quick and precise taking no notice of Erin and she takes no notice of them.

The psychiatrist’s office was very different from the ophthalmologist’s office. First of all, there was no throne. Compared to the ophthalmologist’s office, this one was quite small. There was no room for a throne. An ordinary chair — no leather, no arms — stood pressed against the
wall by the door across from hers. Pictures hung crooked on the walls, halogen lights illuminating a room enveloped by papers.

*SD*: Members of the chorus simultaneously drop stacks of paper — the sound is heavy — Erin takes no notice of this.

A desk stands against the wall close to my chair spilling over with files and notes. A printer on the desk appears to be in mid jam, an actual *paper-jam* frozen in time. Clearly, she had not gone paperless. Her office took on the appearance of a storage room, disorganized, scattered — that should have been my first hint.

*SD*: The chorus members, each at different times, begin to notice Erin. They are intrigued by her. As the scene progresses, each of them finds a spot in the office from which to observe her. Some are perched on the desk, others lay on the floor, some squat around her chair, others hover over her. Erin takes no notice of them.

The wait for this appointment was three months, I didn’t know what to expect. I just wanted to know more about my oil spot so I could plan. I wanted to know, to speak and be heard. Maybe this time they would like me and maybe this time I could finally know… know more. I was in university and I needed to know what to expect. I was in graduate school and I knew there would be a lot of reading, I expected this. What I needed to know was what I could expect from my eyes. What would they do? How would they act and react to all of this reading? I wanted to know how my eyes, how my oil spot would be. I wanted to know so I could figure out what to do in order to be a graduate student. Should I take all my coursework in the beginning? If my eyes were going to change that would be a good idea. It would be good to get all the required reading out of the way, that way I wouldn’t have to worry about it. *If my vision is going to change*…
Change — an interesting choice of words. Change into what? Get better, would my eyes change and get better? I didn’t mean that. Worse. I meant would they get worse. This is what I meant by change.

Despite what I meant, I used the word change. More palatable, is it more palatable? When I ask a doctor, is the word change more palatable? Will my eyes change? Is that more acceptable to my version of a medical doctor than will my eyes get worse? My choice of the word change seemed to be oriented more to doctors then to what I wanted to know. I wanted to know if my eyes would get worse.

I didn’t want to know the cause of my oil spot. At that point, it really didn’t matter. It wouldn’t change anything. I just wanted to know how it would be; would it be worse? A diagnosis is relevant, of course, especially to medicine. But, sometimes a prognosis is more relevant than a diagnosis, especially to a patient. A prognosis — that’s what I wanted — would my eyes get worse?

Asking the ophthalmologist about change was, apparently, unhealthy. Wanting to plan out the next four years of my PhD based on my “changing” eyes was not only unhealthy, but also dangerous, to use his words. But a psychiatrist? Was this really necessary?

SD: The chorus slowly begins to creep closer to Erin, cautiously forming a horseshoe shape around her.

Her office was located at the back of the hospital in the psychiatric ward, the part of the hospital that had offices with names on the doors. My appointment was for 5 o’clock.

SD: The chorus begins to form a structure around Erin using their bodies as set pieces.
The hospital was old. It had mahogany wood trim around the doors, curtains in the windows, large lighting sconces on the walls and chandeliers hung low from the ceilings. It was quite beautiful in a creepy kind of way. I couldn’t make up my mind if I loved or hated it. Her office was at the back, in the new-ish part of the hospital. “Down the hall, turn right at the double doors, go through the doors, then left, walk straight, you’ll see a glass “elephant walk” over the outdoor parking lot, walk through this, up the elevators on your left, through the big doors, oh — push the red button to open the big doors, walk past seven regular doors, the office on the left is mine — don’t knock, I’m in session — just wait.” The psychiatrist gave me these instructions on the phone.

SD: The chorus is now in an arch formation over Erin.

I had an idea of what kind of doctor she was, one that read too much into everything, so I had to think ahead. Maybe this office was not so different from the one in ophthalmology.

SD: The structures that surround Erin collapses — they fall, scattering themselves around her.

“Thanks for helping me find her office. Mum, would you mind sitting in this waiting room? It’s out of sight. This way I don’t think she will suspect that we are together.” The last thing I needed was for her to write… (SD: The chorus members simultaneously sit up): “the patient appears to have an attachment disorder, unable to attend the appointment without her mother…interesting…very interesting.” At least, this is what I imagine the psychiatrist would write. (SD: The chorus then drops back to the floor).

Unlike my ophthalmological appointment, I knew what to expect in this psychiatric one. Vision loss, questions about it, concern about what to expect, all of these, psychological issues.
Blindness, understood in contemporary culture as a “loss,” is often responded to as such. Lose something, miss it, grieve its loss. Before things get “unhealthy” and “dangerous” refer to a psychiatrist, so the ophthalmological reasoning goes. Not only is this referral to a psychiatrist, but to a woman and, if that’s not enough, to a blind woman. Clearly, the patient will relate to the psychiatrist, so goes the ophthalmological reasoning.

The door opened and a white cane hit the side of the door, “Erin?”

*SD: The chorus rises from the floor and begins to move toward an empty chair in the psychiatrist’s office. Their movements are made up of sharp, almost jagged choreography—they move as if they were one entity.*

“Oh, hi Doctor,” keep it light and polite, “thank you so much for taking the time,” this stuff is worth its weight in gold! Even this psychiatrist won’t think I’m maladjusted. She led me into the office and I sat in the chair against the wall across from hers. She placed her cane against the wall, sat down and grabbed her paper and pen.

*SD: The “body” of the chorus now makes up one large figure across from Erin, they stare at her. Erin turns her head and looks at them.*

“So, tell me your story,” the psychiatrist said.

“Umm, tell you about my eyes? Would you like me to start when my eyesight began to change?”

*SD: Erin turns her head away from the chorus.*

“Sure, or not, whatever you would like. Start with high school,” the psychiatrist said.
I couldn’t help but laugh a little. Offering a person the freedom to start their story at whatever point they like and then telling them where to start, that’s a little funny. It was not amusing but more intriguing — an odd sort of funny. Our culture often expects that a loss such as blindness may lead to a psychological disorder. Referring me to a psychiatrist meant that this might be possible in my case. I, however, didn’t understand myself this way and yet I wasn’t certain. Perhaps the psychiatrist would discover some psychological instability in me and perhaps her question, contradictory and odd as it seemed, was a psychiatric technique for discovering this. I was definitely being cautious.

I cleared my throat. “I went to an arts high school, where I majored in drama.” Her cell phone began to ring. She looked at the screen, put it down and nodded to me, giving me a sign, a visual one, to keep talking.

“Ah, it was great so I decided to study drama in university — do you need to take that? Your phone?” She was visibly distracted; her phone had captured her attention. “Yes, yeah, just hang on a minute there, Er-hang on.” Had she forgotten my name? She listened to her messages. “Nope, no it’s fine, continue.” And I did. I told her about my oil spot and finally how I ended up in her office.

“And that brings me to you. The doctor referred me to you. He said that you would have more information regarding my eyes, that you would be able to fill me in so to speak.”

SD: The chorus, moving as one, shifts to a new position.
She laughed, placing her pen and paper with “her-eyes-only notes” on the desk. I looked at her with pleasant neutrality, my eyes fixed, as best I could, on hers. Her laughter didn’t seem funny.

“I can’t help you, I mean I don’t know what you want. SickKid’s Hospital keeps sending me their blind adult patients when they can no longer see them anymore because I’m blind and they think that, I don’t know, that I can help because I have experience with blindness. I work with the critically mentally ill, Erin, schizophrenia, that sort of thing.”

I was growing accustomed to this — doctors passing me on, “referring” me to other doctors, avoiding my questions, promises of “they’ll know more” never resulting in more than more wasted time. Interesting, though, and even expected, it was my time being wasted, not theirs. The appointment was over. The psychiatrist was of no use, she admitted that. And yet, the appointment continued, she continued it.

*SD: The chorus slowly dismantles their unity and creeps toward Erin.*

Two hours and twenty minutes of asking what eye specialists I had seen, offering *her* opinions of each, telling me the assisted devices *she* loved, “let’s not tell OHIP this is an assessed devices chat” she chuckled, and so on. I wanted to leave, this was a waste, she was talking about things that were of no value to me but I could not move. It felt as if I were being held hostage in her small, disorganized office.

*SD: One chorus member reaches out for Erin’s hand, pulls her to her feet and draws her toward them. They dance. She is tossed among the other members — they are in control of her movements.*
If I left — “The patient left the appointment abruptly, unable to discuss her vision, a hostile act, she is clearly not handling this well ... interesting ... very interesting.” I imagine the psychiatrist writing this too. So, I sat, listening to her; positive neutrality splashed across my face, nodding my head as she spoke, smiling, “Oh that sounds interesting.”

**SD:** The pace and intricacy of the dance increases.

My eyes began to ache as I fixed my gaze on hers. I was trying to steady my eyes. My head throbbed. My eyes were not used to such a prolonged focus, to such bright halogen lighting. My central vision filled with grey fuzz and the swirling oil began to widen as though objecting to this prolonged appointment, they were tired and I needed to leave.

“Doctor, I don’t mean to be rude, you are very lovely but I’m sure I am not what you expected and you are certainly not what I expected.” I trailed off hoping she would get the hint.

“So, you want to end.”

**SD:** Erin’s dance partner pushes her back into the chair. The chorus continues to dance in front of her.

“OK,” the psychiatrist continued. “Well, I need to diagnose you with something. How do you feel about an adjustment disorder with a little depression,” she said smiling.

This shocked me. I didn’t know what she meant. Was she saying I had an adjustment disorder with a little depression? I didn’t think so, but I didn’t know what she was saying.

“Excuse me?” I said.
“Well” she exhaled, “I need to diagnose you with something, OHIP requires that I put in a diagnosis code for the session.”

It was clear now. She wanted to get paid. I shook my head from side to side quickly in disbelief, scrunching my nose and eyes.

*SD: Erin stands, trying to get the attention of the chorus, trying to interrupt their dance.*

“But I don’t have any of those things,” I said. “Can you not just put in a consultation visit? Is there a code for that?”

*SD: Silence.*

“How about a little anxiety? That’s not so bad.” We went back and forth as I tried to explain how I felt. She was creating a file. I was becoming a file. The psychiatrist was not upset with this. Presumably, she had created many files. I, in contrast, wasn’t creating a file, I was being created. Creating files and being created as such marks an essential feature of the patient/doctor relation.

*SD: All but one of the chorus members stop dancing and freeze. This member and Erin begin dancing. Their choreography is passionate and fast. As they dance, the rest of the chorus exit the stage one at a time. Erin is spun and then abandoned by the remaining chorus member.*

I left her office, not knowing what label she chose to describe me.
SCENE X

SD: The stage is empty. A gobo\textsuperscript{10} is used to manipulate the light, dark rainbow lit shadows speckle the stage producing a pattern similar to that of leaves on the ground.

Curtain.

\textsuperscript{10} A Gobo is a thin stencil placed in front of a stage light to manipulate the shape or pattern of the light emitted onstage.
I cannot really tell you the exact moment my eyes became more blind than they were sighted. I do not have a date on the calendar that marks the beginning of my blindness, no birth date to celebrate. An exact account of blindness as a birth in my life is not something I have. Unlike the late playwright Lynn Manning, who called October 25th his re-birthday, the day a gunshot wound claimed his sight, I have no such exact re-birthday. Still, there is a genesis, a beginning rooted in an ending, the beginning of an end of a taken-for-granted sighted world. My blindness came to me in difference. It was a difference, however, that took its time. A difference that was felt before it was noticed and a difference that was exclusively mine.

It was not so much a difference of how I saw the world since we all at times see things differently. The difference was how I could relate to the everyday sighted world, how I would come to interpret it and how people in it would interpret me. My blindness marks the “beginning” of the end of taking-for-granted that sightedness is the dominant way of being in the world. As Howes (1991) says, sight provides for distance. There is a sense of community albeit sometimes experienced in the primacy of the private that sighted people share. For instance, sighted people, although continuously visually available to one another, have the opportunity to decide on interaction. Moving away, at a party for example, when noticing someone approaching with whom you do not wish to speak is an example of what I refer to as the primacy of the private. Blind people, in contrast, rarely share this community of opportunity.

\[11\] Personal communication with Rod Michalko.
In contemporary Western culture, and perhaps in all cultures, sight marks a key component of communication. It is regarded as what is shared between us, held in common forming a common-sense world. There is a sense of intimacy in sight; sighted people come together in the intimacy of the common world they create and share together.

Blindness, too has its intimacy. But, this intimacy is not privy to the shared world of sight. There is nothing immediately intimate between blindness and sight since in the common-sense world notion of sight, blindness is its opposite, its lack, its absence. And yet, a closer “look” at the relation between the two reveals the intimacy that exists between anything and its opposite, between anything and the lack of that thing. This sort of intimacy, however, is not immediately noticeable since it is often couched in the affect of plenitude and lack. Intimacy is also created between the two when blindness moves in the world common-sensically understood as sighted, in the sighted world. Like the doctor who could not fathom Erin’s description, image, of her blindness, sight often has difficulty grasping its own absence. Something other than opposition is required if blindness is to share more than the intimacy found in the quintessential impediment to sight. The intimacy of perception between sight and hearing, for example, is grounded in the physiological ‘fact’ that both are part of the sensorium. For such an intimacy to exist between sight and blindness, the latter must be understood as part of the sensorium rather than the manicure of a flawed sensorium.

Hannah Arendt (1958) may allow for some explication of this “problem” of intimacy between blindness and sight. She says:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around
it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men [sic] at the same time. (p. 52)

What does it take for blindness and sight to “live together in the world”? It takes, as Arendt suggests, “essentially a world of things” between blindness and sight, but things in a world they “have in common.” Sighted people can sit at the table and can do so together since the “thing,” table, is between them in a world they have in common. But, what of blind people? Where is our table? Where is that thing… for us? What world do we share with sighted others that puts tables between us so that we may live together? The table at which we (blind people) and sighted people sit is, in a common-sense way, undoubtedly a “sighted table.” Our table, a blind table, is an interesting imaginary in that blindness, while understood as the opposite of sight, is not understood as opposite to sight. Sight, that is, is not “seen” as the opposite of blindness, at least not in a conventional sense. A blind table, then, would be understood as just as much a lack as is blindness. (In a sense, this dissertation could be read as an exploration of the potential of blindness and sight coming together in the act of living together).

There is an in-betweenness that separates blindness from sight. At the same time, it is this same in-betweenness that permits for the two to relate. The question is not whether blindness and sight, blind people and sighted people, can relate to one another, for we do. Neither is the question whether blind people and sighted people are separate from one another, for we are. The question is, how do we relate and how are we separated?

We might re-ask this question with Arendt’s metaphor of the table in mind: What would it mean to treat blindness and sight as both related and separate? This may be treated as a phenomenological question since phenomenology considers the importance of lived experience,
the ready-at-hand taken-for-granted everyday “routine” actions that shape who we are and where we find ourselves, and how our relations to one another brings us together and simultaneously separate us (Ahmed, 2006, p. 544; Schutz, 1967). How we live together in the world depends on how we experience that world, how we approach, relate and orient ourselves to the spaces between us, spaces that both Arendt and Ahmed depict metaphorically as tables. How this unfolds depends on the orientation taken to the table at which blindness and sight meet.

Sarah Ahmed (2006) tells us that, “the starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling” (p. 545). Recall Erin sitting on the faux leather upholstered chair in the eye doctor’s examination room. She sits, wide-eyed, staring at a counter (table) that runs along the perimeter of the room. The counter is “set” with medical instruments. She stares, imagining the purpose of each and how she would respond were the doctor to use them on her. The doctor is seated on a stool beside the counter. This is his office, the medical instruments belong to him and, perhaps, he is the one who “set the table” with these instruments. He is not looking at the counter. He is looking at his computer. He is typing notes about Erin considering, perhaps, what instrument to use. Both sit together in the examination room. A way to perceive a “starting point” of orientation, to borrow from Ahmed, for both Erin and the doctor begins in the eyes. It is from here that a there-ness of their “world unfolds.” It is in this shared “there” “where” they dwell. In their shared world, there are sights between them to be seen and the eyes, their eyes, do the work of seeing these “sights.” Both Erin and the doctor “dwell” in a sighted culture — it is their shared culture and how they orient to it that draws them to the table. The meaning of their relation unfolds within the meaning of the cultural relation between blindness and sight.
The doctor performs his role in this culture by reinforcing the cultural fact that eyes are meant to see a shared world. If they do not, if there is hesitation or question surrounding what is seen or what there is to be seen then the doctor is culturally responsible for attending to this “problem.” Erin shares this orientation. She has come to “see” the doctor and to be seen by the doctor (Foucault, 1973, p. 89). What she is “seeing,” after all, is not a sight found ready-at-hand in her culture. She sees something that is not in the world (the doctor knows this, too) and yet, it has become her world (of this, the doctor is not convinced). She experiences an intimacy, a togetherness, with her own vision, an intimacy not experienced by the doctor. The table between them is set with sight — she tells the doctor what she sees, the doctor tells her what she sees is not “there” to be seen. Blindness and sight are here held by the relation of separation.

Erin arrives at the table, the examination room, to share her experience of her sight with the expectation that the doctor will “see” what makes her see in the way that she does and offer an explanation. What brings them to the same table is a shared belief in the cultural fact of sight with the expectation of a comradery of purpose, namely, explanation and potential remedy. What is done with this shared belief and culture (the table) while uniting them, also separates them. They are united in the place of medicine, of expectations, of promise and separated in the knowledge they have of each other. This is one way in which the relation between blindness and sight generates separation. Moreover, the doctor is separated from Erin in the midst of their shared understanding of the purpose of the table. The purpose of remedy, of course, is represented in the disappointment found in unrequited expectation. How this comradery and shared culture of sight are experienced, interpreted and thus made to mean shifts in how both orient to each other at the table. “Where,” to return to Ahmed, Erin and the doctor find themselves together, their “here” is the table of ophthalmology set with its instruments. The point
at which their shared world unfolds splits when they bring the possibility of blindness to the table. Erin sees, but not what the doctor or, any other sighted person, sees. The doctor is right in what he sees; Erin is wrong. What the doctor knows from his seeing is legitimate; what Erin knows from her seeing is not. The two are united in the table of sight and its purpose in the form of knowledge and separated in legitimate knowledge for the one and illegitimate for the other.

The “table” (counter) represents more than a resting place for ophthalmological instruments, the table is a metaphor for our engagement with culture. There are many tables in our everyday lives at which we meet and engage with others. There are cocktail tables at which we socialize, card tables at which we play, negotiating tables where we must compromise, dining tables that require reservations, operating tables where trust is given and expertise is expected, there are gift tables, multiplication tables, tables of content. These tables may be housed in their own rooms, giving them a life of their own — the proverbial kitchen table. Each table is set with its own script, its own cast of players and motivations; it draws to its edges different people at different times and performs a facet of the culture in which it exists. Ahmed (2006) tells us that, “how the table matters relates to not only how it arrives but what it allows us to do” (p. 551). The influence of the table depends upon the strength of the unity it builds within a culture, a unity particularly oriented to its putative purpose.

Not only does it matter how a table arrives, how we arrive at it matters, too. Our arrival is an indication of how we interpret the world and what we make of that interpretation. Each table allows for a different part of ourselves to be revealed, interpreted and then acted upon. The table of medicine is one of the most influential tables set by culture. It is a high-end table of specialists, an exclusive table where a place at it is based on insider knowledge or by referral (invitation) only. This table is set with expectations of purpose, of hope and, of course,
corresponding instruments. This table of medicine is set for all of us in contemporary Western culture and awaits our inevitable arrival.

Sight is not typically a cause for concern. Blindness, in contrast, is understood as a problem. In fact, to say blindness is a problem is already superfluous. Since antiquity in the West, light has been understood as knowledge and as enlightenment. The metaphors of light and sight have been used through the centuries as ways of speaking and even of experiencing knowledge and enlightenment (Jay, 1994; Mirzoeff, 1998). Moreover, arenas of everyday life hold sight as essential and blindness the basis of a problematic life (Manning, 1999; Kleege, 2000; Knighton, 2006). Not seeing in everyday life is typically understood as a difficult and problem life. (This is evidenced, among other ways, in how ‘accommodations’ are sometimes made for blind people in work places and in educational settings).

Thus, the permanent arrivals at the table of ophthalmology are blindness and sight and the relation and separation between the two. The former arrives at the table as the problem whereas the latter arrives as the solution. This marked my arrival at the table of ophthalmology. The oil spot I saw needed to be seen by sight (the ophthalmologist) so that my vision as a problem could be shared, transformed from a problem of my eyes to a problem of the eyes.

This transformation inevitably comes with emotion. Emotion which springs from the genesis of blindness — blindness is emotional. Of such emotion, Ahmed (2004) says, “The tingles, pricks and then cramps return me to my body by giving me a sense of the edge or border, a “sense” that is an experience of intensification and a departure from what is lived as ordinary” (p. 27). The muscle tension, spasms, cramps and tingles in my neck and the prickly feeling in my facial muscles snap me back from my eyes and thrusts me firmly into my body. It
is as though my psyche and my feelings thrust blindness into my body and distribute it throughout my being prompting medicine to return it to its proper psychological space. It is a medical hermeneutic that prompts this back and forth of blindness as it travels throughout the body. The emotion of these feelings removes blindness from one locale in my body to, what feels like, my entire body. Indeed, my entire being. The ordinary is no longer part of my blindness; its medical origin (the eyes) are left behind. The eye doctor, however, demands that my blindness returns to the ordinary, to the source and origin from which blindness marks a problematic departure. He, or rather ophthalmology, is not interested in my body’s response to my eyes. Instead, the eyes and, only the eyes, mark the location of his interest; marks the origin of blindness. The doctor’s medical gaze (Foucault, 1973) is focused on the eyes and not on the rest of the body.

This emotion is experienced and recognized by the ophthalmologist as well as by the “patient.” It is this recognition that often leads to the emotional work of a different medical table, one set for that purpose. I speak here of Psychiatry. And, I speak of the referral, of the “passing on” of the “problem” of emotion to those expert in such work (Michalko, 1998, Chapter 4: Rehabilitation, pp. 65-101).

Within the framework of what might be called a medical hermeneutic — a focus on medicine as an interpretive act, medicine as interpretation — we find the possibility of a poetics of the eye. Medicine, in its diagnostic activity, closes this possibility. The eye, instead, becomes the focus of “working or not” and, if not, why not? followed by how to make the eye “right again.” But, if we treat medical diagnostics as itself an interpretation not merely of “what’s wrong,” but also of how all future interpretation of blindness is to be oriented, we may move beyond a merely biological understanding of blindness and the eye. We may “see” not only what
medicine makes of blindness but what it asks us, blind or sighted, to make of blindness. This “making,” poiesis, cultivates the possibility of an interpretative relation to both blindness, sight and medicine. Furthermore, this allows for a poiesis, a making, of a multitude of interpretations of blindness and thus the eye. It is in this sense, that the genesis of my blindness bore a diagnosis and thus provides for the possibility, a possibility beyond sheer medical diagnosis, of a poetics of the eye and of blindness as well.

My oil spot, a constant companion from my grandmother’s driveway, was transformed (diagnosed) by the ophthalmologist as “blindness” — not just any blindness, but a rare genetic kind, Stargardt’s disease. He named my oil spot, my companion. He gave it a history, a medical history and he gave me a medical status, “legally blind.” The psychiatrist took the medical history and my newfound medical status and created a file. This file too, included a naming, a diagnosis. But, unlike the ophthalmological diagnosis, this one was false, not merely made, but made up. I wasn’t depressed even a little nor did I have an adjustment disorder. These diagnoses were strictly bureaucratic; they were administrative in character permitting the psychiatrist to be paid. Nonetheless, and false as they were, these diagnoses and the ophthalmological one commingled to make up my ‘file.’

It was this file that the university was quite interested in. My PhD studies continued — no prognosis, no answers about what would happen to my vision. The continuation of my education bore an eerie resemblance to my experience with medicine. A lack of understanding of my vision seemed to follow me from the throne of the ophthalmologist and from the ordinary chair of the psychiatrist to the rolling chair of the classroom.
ACT II

EMOTION AND THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

SCENE I

SD: The stage is empty. A faint hint of rainbow lit shadows speckles the stage with a strong white wash of halogen lighting. With a sudden burst of energy, the chorus rushes onstage, once again building and dressing the set. An office begins to take shape.

A dark wooden desk rests centre stage with a computer atop it. Shelves are placed forming two of the interior walls of the emerging office. These shelves hold knickknacks, large glossy binders and a few books. There is a stiff wooden chair behind the desk and in front of it stands a rolling chair. Scattered around the office are terracotta pots of various sizes with green spindly plants spilling over their edges.

Erin enters stage left finding herself in yet another office. She stands, holding a stack of loose-leaf papers and files. She waits. One chorus member grabs the stack of papers from her. She is startled. The papers are then passed among the other members. Some keep a few of the papers for themselves before passing them on while others merely scan the pages and pass them on.
This movement is choreographed revealing its own rhythm. Erin follows this rhythm, hoping that the papers will find a resting spot on the desk. She watches, waiting, bobbing her head to the rhythm of the papers movement. Her eyes begin to wander around the room as her head still bobs.

It felt as though I was becoming a bit of an office connoisseur. Waiting for whomever it was I was seeing that particular time allowed me to look around. I began noticing things like wall
hangings and how they might provide some insight to the person I was about to meet. My peripheral vision was “seeing” the periphery of the office, something not noticed by those occupying it. Two walls of this office were covered in wall-hangings, for example, that intrigued me.

*SD: The rhythm of the chorus’ movement slows down, they become robotic, gliding and jerking their bodies as they continue to pass the papers. Erin bobs her head to the new rhythm while continuing to look around the office.*

On the walls hung framed degrees, diplomas, certificates and awards, the details of which I could read only if I stood near to them. I wondered if the person I was about to meet hung these with purpose? Had they hoped I would read them and infer that they were the expert in the room, that they were a part of something official?

*SD: The chorus breaks with its robotic movement and becomes more playful. They bounce and sway into each other’s arms as they pass and scan the papers.*

There were also photographs of what appears to be families, travel, events, etc. Did their presence hint at a more relaxed, even relatable side of them?

*SD: Erin stands, facing the audience. She leans forward squinting her eyes.*

Was I supposed to look at these photos and see how much we held in common?

*SD: The chorus changes its movement once again. This time they appear more militaristic. They are faster, sharper and in perfect unison. Erin bobs her head in time.*
The origin of mass produced art and the purpose of posters with inspirational messages were more mysterious than that of the framed degrees and photographs on this wall. It was hard to figure out if the occupant of the office chose to hang the art and messages or if they were placed there by the university. I couldn’t get a sense of who this person was from these particular hangings.

SD: The chorus breaks into four groups together with their rhythm and choreography. One group is the robotic type, the next more playful, the third maintains the militaristic beat while the remaining one make up a group of random rhythm and movements. All four groups make a distinct sound corresponding to their rhythm and movement. Erin listens, attempting to catch the rhythm of any of the groups. She stands with her hands clasped in front of her. The four groups continue their rhythm and movement. They scatter around the office, some sitting, some standing and others perched atop furniture. Although Erin is alone, she detects the sound of the chorus and feels the vibration of their movements. She is alone. The chorus appears as though ghosts haunting the office. Erin begins ringing her hands, she closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She cannot figure out who belongs in this office, who to expect. Erin cannot fully decipher the rhythm of this office. She does not know who to expect. The ringing of her hands emphasis her need for the chorus, her need to feel their rhythm and to figure out to whom this office belongs.

\footnote{12 See Avery Gordon (2008) for a discussion on haunting.}
I made a game out of predicting how an appointment would play out based on office aesthetics and decorations. This office, unlike the others, did not make its character known. It offered many wall hangings with no particular focus.

*SD: The chorus stops and looks at Erin as though encouraging her to figure out their rhythm.*

There were, however, plants everywhere. I wondered what their presence was trying to tell me.

*SD: One chorus member lies on the floor tapping out a rhythm with their hands; another stands snapping their fingers in time with the other member’s rhythm. The remaining ones join in creating their own jazz-like contribution to the rhythm, clapping their hands, tapping their feet, dancing, and the like. Erin begins to move her body subtly to the rhythm. She appears as though she is unaware that she is doing so.*

This office was part of Accessibility Services for students with disabilities at the University of Toronto. All students who identified as disabled were referred to this office. In fact, students with disabilities, including me, were directed by a letter to go immediately to accessibility services. Part of the application to post graduate school and an aspect of identifying as disabled included “proof” of disability. A student’s word does not constitute proof. Medical experts, in contrast, do. I was required to arrange for my ophthalmologist to forward a report on my eyes to the university as proof of my disability. Neither my word nor my experience constituted “identifying” as a student with a disability for the purposes of the university. A disability identity, proved by medical practitioners, permitted the university to continue its practises in relation to disability. For the university, having a disability meant, in part, requiring help in the form of accommodation and sometimes counselling. Counselling in relation to
accommodation is always required and this is how I ended up in the office of accessibility services and in the particular office of, what was called, “my disability councillor.”

SD: The chorus stops its jazz like movements. Erin continues to hum their rhythm as she walks toward the front of the desk. The chorus assembles behind the desk and place all the papers into one large file and rests it on the desk. They stand and she sits in the rolling chair.

The roiling chair of this office was unsteady, not because it was on wheels but because the back of the chair was not fully connected to the seat. Whatever connected the two together had come loose and made sitting uncomfortable. Erin sits in the chair, her body is straight and muscles stiff. She is engaged in a double balancing act, attempting to steady the loose mechanics while trying not to engage the wheels of the chair. She looks up at the configuration of the chorus standing before her. Erin holds the last note of her humming. She takes a deep breath, as she speaks the back of the chair moves startling her.

“Hi — (SD: She jolts in her chair and immediately looks to the back of the seat),

whoa!”

SD: Erin lets out a bit of a nervous laugh. The chorus maintains its quiet stare. Erin clears her throat.

“Hi. Um, I’m Erin. And ah, well, I’m here to talk about setting up some sort of an account, or starting some sort of process regarding accommodation? I’m a new student here and ah, well, I’m blind, (SD: The chorus leans closer to Erin seemingly attempting to get a better look), so… I’m wondering what or how or if there is anything
we can do or if we can set up some kind of... I really don’t know. I guess, I mean

should I let my professors know I’m blind? I was sent here by a letter, it instructed me
to make an appointment with you.”

SD: Erin is now leaning, arms straight hands pressed on her thighs, forward in her seat to meet
the gaze of the chorus. They all move back and one chorus member slides down into the wooden
chair taking on the role of the councillor. The remaining members maintain contact with one
another: one member stands behind the councillor resting their head and hands on the head of
the councillor, another links arms, others connect to each other by standing on their hands and
touching feet. They take on the behaviour of Cirque du Soleil clowns both acrobatic and silly,
choosing elaborate and almost odd points of contact. As the scene progresses, every member of
the chorus, including the one playing the councillor, maintains physical contact, the point of
contact and their positions shifting throughout the scene.

“Not a problem at all, let me just bring up your file! (SD: The councillor says almost
jumping with glee). Let’s draft a letter!”

This letter was intended to be my proof, almost like a receipt, informing professors that I
was indeed blind and that they, as employees of the university, could not discriminate against me
by refusing to lend assistance. Seemed simple enough.

SD: The chorus changes its position forming an elaborate shape with their bodies.
“Oh wait — do you have medical documentation? Something from a reputable physician supporting your claims? In this case that you are, permanently blind?”

SD: The chorus breaks contact and begins looking through the file of papers, passing them around to one another — appearing to scan for any “official” permanent blind statement.

Medical history sent by a student’s doctor was sufficient to book an appointment with the accessibility services office and to meet with a councillor. The most recent documentation, however, was needed for accommodation to be made. The need for recent medical updates was required by the university since to them, disability was a medical issue that could “change.” If a student registered with accessibility were to “improve” medically (become non-disabled), then they would no longer qualify for the accommodation. If a student’s disability were to worsen, then more testing would be needed and more reports would be required to be sent by medical practitioners in order to change any existing accommodation. There was, of course, the concern of cheating.

“Students are not always truthful, Erin. (SD: The chorus continues searching through the file of papers). We need to ensure that those receiving accommodation are deserving.”

The councillor made it clear that not all students were deserving of accommodation, that disabled students are deserving only if they could prove they are disabled.
SD: Erin reaches into her jacket pocket and pulls out an envelope. The chorus stops searching through the papers, in unison they turn and focus on the envelope. They gasp. She hands it to the councillor.

“Oh! SickKids Hospital and the CNIB\textsuperscript{13} — nice!”

SD: The councillor says this almost jumping, once again, in her chair. The chorus resumes their previous configuration behind the member playing the role of councillor.

Yet another file was being created — a student file. (SD: The chorus begins frantically passing a file to one another, each, in turn, shoving a paper into it). Medical notes and information from the many offices before comprised this file. And now, a new letter was added.

“Oh okay there Erin, we are almost done! This is a copy of the letter we are going to send to your professors, (SD: The councillor simultaneously turns the screen of her computer to face Erin) just take a quick read and I will be right back!”

SD: The chorus breaks their connection allowing for the councillor to stand.

“Um, sorry but I can’t see the screen.”

SD: Erin is visibly uncomfortable in her chair. She uses her feet to shuffle closer to the desk. Some of the chorus members instantly connect to the councillor, holding onto her arms, legs, etc.

\textsuperscript{13} For a historical timeline of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and for a breakdown of its evolving perspectives of blindness and education, read: http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/who/history/timeline/Pages/default.aspx
The remaining members move toward Erin. Some crawl, others do summersaults and one even bounces on their hands.

“What? Oh! Right! Oh, my gosh, Erin! How silly of me! Right, yes of course! Here, I will make the font bigger, (SD: The councillor leans forward, makes the changes and turns the screen toward Erin once more) now you take a quick read and I will be right back!”

Despite the wheels and loose mechanics of the chair, I maintain my balance. There was something different about this appointment; I didn’t feel nervous but there was something very different about this office. It seemed, as the councillor had said earlier, silly. There was a silly quality to our interaction. Was the councillor serious? Had she really just asked me, twice now, to read from the computer? How could she ask me when she has my file right there — she knows I am blind. It reminded me of the ophthalmologist telling me to “look” at the book of red and green dots. This was odd.

SD: The councillor walks across the stage and the chorus follows, some doing cartwheels, others jumping. Erin turns to follow the councillor as she attempts to exist saying, in an almost “you’re joking, right?” kind of way...

“Sorry, the sun is really bright, I can’t make out the screen.”

SD: The chorus freezes while the councillor turns to face Erin.

“How, (SD: She exhales) you can’t, eh?”
SD: The councillor begins walking back to her chair behind the desk. As she does, the chorus follows, some do backflips, others cartwheel etc., until they find a connected resting place around the councillor. The councillor looks at her screen, pauses, exahles, and then looks at Erin.

“I would print it out but the font is so big — the trees — we need to think of them.”

SD: Her face is scrunched in a sort of “you get it” way.

She had gone paperless but different from the ophthalmologist — she had gone green. This was my first hint as to how the university prioritizes accommodation needs of disabled students.

“No, I get it, I mean I don’t want to murder any trees. (SD: The mood in the office is a bit tense, awkward even). Could you read it out loud to me, that way no trees will be harmed in the writing of his letter.”

SD: Erin laughs, attempting to lighten the mood. The councillor looks at her watch.

“It’s a bit long but okay.”

SD: She begins reading the letter\(^\text{14}\) out loud. The chorus begins jumping, dancing and playing around the office.

\(^\text{14}\) The following are excerpts from the email that was sent on my behalf to my professors. I have omitted information to ensure the privacy of university staff and faculty.
“I hope this message finds you well. I'm writing on behalf of Erin (Student #123456789), a student enrolled in your course for September 2013. Erin is registered with Accessibility Services and some of her accommodations will require your assistance.

Below are Erin's academic accommodations for your course. Of most importance at this time is timely access to course readings as Erin accesses print materials using technology. We work with the university library to facilitate requests for accessible print material. Once Erin receives the reading list from you, she will work with the library —”

SD: Erin interjects.

“Sorry, so I do that?”

SD: The councillor smiles, nods and continues reading.

“If there are readings available in PDF or for download, Erin would be able to access these. If you have the course outline fully prepared or still in draft form, having access to it now will help to plan access to readings.”

SD: Erin interjects again, trying to get a sense of how accommodation at the university works.

“Oh, okay, so the prof sends me the readings and I contact the library and arrange to have them scanned. Okay. Wow, okay so I am going to need them like ASAP.”
SD: The councillor smiles, nods and continues reading.

“Alternative Print Material: Course readings required in advance of the class, enlarged format required for any handouts given in class or these are to be emailed in advance to Erin. Peer note-taker. It is the student's responsibility to register for the note-taking service and after doing so, you will be contacted by our note-taking service requesting that an announcement be made in class to assist with recruiting a volunteer note-taker —”

SD: Erin cuts the councillor off in mid-sentence.

“Sorry to interrupt again but I just want to make sure I am getting all of this. So, if I find I need a note taker I can’t set that up with you, I need to go somewhere else and arrange it with someone else?”

SD: The councillor smiles, nods and continues reading.

“May require extensions for classwork assignments on a case by case basis for disability related reasons. All the best for the coming year!”

SD: The councillor turns to face Erin. The chorus tiptoes behind the councillor and all begin making silly faces.

“Sound good?”
SD: Erin tries to respond but she is cut off.

“Okay well now we have this in your file, I will just press send, oh there we go, the letter has been sent, all that is left to do is wait for the professor to contact you via email.”

SD: The chorus lifts the councillor up and carries her to the door, they swing her three times and throw her off stage, she yells...

“Have a great summer, Erin!”

SD: Blackout.

I had waited the entire summer for the response. The professor did not finalize the course outline and reading list until the beginning of September. The lateness of this response left me exactly two weeks to get acquainted with the process of acquiring accommodation from the library. This process was tedious and slow, not at all what the letter led me to expect. In two weeks, the library had only 15% of the course readings transformed into a format I could read.

SCENE II

SD: The stage is dark. The sound of a heavy stack of paper hitting the top of a desk is heard, then, the sound of chalk on a blackboard. Bright white lights fade up revealing a large rectangular shaped classroom. Long tables are arranged in a horseshoe shape with rolling chairs tucked in flush to the tables’ edges. At one end of the room a professor stands, writing on the blackboard. Behind her, there is a small table covered with paper, this table does not connect
to the horseshoe. The other end of the room is made up of a wall of windows. The bright late afternoon sun of early September streams in, its rays stretching along the tops of the tables.

Erin enters stage right. She is standing just visible on the threshold of the classroom. Except for the professor she stands alone and is looking around the room. From off-stage we hear talking and the rustling of bags, keys, etc. The chorus emerges from stage right, this time as students. They enter the classroom with a flood of energy, passing Erin, some even nudging her. She attempts to apologize and move out of the way but is too slow, they have all reached the tables leaving her standing, a bit rattled, alone. She watches them. The chorus looks comfortable sitting in the rolling chairs as they unpack their bags. They take out laptops, note pads, pens, papers, water bottles and the like. They are prepared; they belong.

Erin stands, still on the threshold, clutching her faux leather bag. The look on her face shows the audience that she is wondering whether she has remembered everything and whether she had prepared enough. She stands, taking shallow breaths — her heartbeat quickens. She continues watching the chorus as they casually sit in their rolling chairs, some talking and laughing, others reading as they wait for class to begin. They act as though they are a part of the room, as though their presence is natural, as though they belong. Erin acts nervous; she clutches her bag; she looks at the chorus with a look that appears as though she is uncertain.

Standing on the threshold of the classroom felt as though I was back on that roller-coaster from the ophthalmologist’s office, teetering on the edge. My mind racing through the many offices I had been in before this moment, before I knew the name of my oil spot, before I identified myself as a blind student. What sort of blindness? Somewhere a feel, more like a
sound, echoes; I hear echoes of prior blindesses, not ones named student, blind student, but eye-
problem, changing-vision. And now, blind student.

SD: Her uncertainty begins to overwhelm her. She hasn’t done this before.

Never before had I been a graduate student. Graduate student — never before had I been
a blind student. Blind student — never before had I been blind.

Could I do this? I wasn’t sure how to be blind and now this? Could I be a blind student?
If you are not sure how to be blind, how can you be a blind graduate student? Blind and a
student. What will people think? What will I say?

SD: Water begins to cloud Erin’s peripheral vision and she has the peculiar sensation that the
water is meeting her oil spot.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry (SD: She chides herself through clenched teeth), stand
straight (SD: She whispers to herself), swing that bag over your shoulder.”

SD: She stares deep into the rainbow layers of her oil spot.

Sometimes, blindness can be felt in places other than the eyes. Sometimes, blindness can
feel as if it is everywhere. When I have been lost for words trying to fight the emotion of my
eyes, attempting not to cry, I felt my blindness in my throat. I felt it in my stomach when the oil
of my spot burns, swirling with an energy of fury and angst, an energy I cannot focus.
Sometimes, I feel my blindness in others; I feel their eyes on mine and I see myself. I feel the
way they see me both in my mind’s eye and in my blind eyes and I especially feel that. And then,
there are times when my blindness completely disappears and I forget that the world does not see
what I see. This is the trouble with blindness, it sometimes disappears. Sometimes, its presence appears absent and in these times, I don’t know what I feel. But, I do feel blindness is everywhere.

SD: Erin takes a deep breath, she must act quickly. She can no longer worry about being noticed. She needs to find a seat. She scans the room. To her right, light pours in through the windows as the sun begins to set, squinting, she knows that is not the spot for her. She would not be able to see the blackboard from there and her eyes would be noticed — she would have to explain herself. To her left, the front of the classroom. It feels a bit exposed, on display, the whole class behind her. She would be in sight of all who could see but close to the professor— she is unsure how to feel. She takes another deep breath. She could take a gamble and sit along one of the sides?

She enters the classroom and walks with determination toward a seat at the end of the horseshoe in front of the classroom, close to the blackboard and opposite the small table covered with papers.

There, in the front of the room — the professor can see me and so can the other students. I can now control what is being seen — how I move, how I look at things, what glasses to wear, when and if I squint — all choices I can make knowing that I may be noticed. Somehow, and I am not sure about this, but somehow, I feel prepared. I feel and, again I am not sure, but I feel like one of the students. I wonder, though, whether I can maintain control of what others see. I wonder whether I can present the “self” of “just a student.” I wonder too, whether the other students are doing the same thing? Are they controlling what others see? Are they controlling the “look” of their student/self? I know I am; do they know they are?
SD: Erin sits in the rolling chair.

“Good evening!”

SD: The professor’s voice booms, signalling that class has begun. The eyes of the chorus turn toward the professor and, so too, do the eyes of Erin.

SCENE III

SD: The attention of the classroom is focused on the professor. Erin sits, her posture straight and aligned in her rolling chair, tucked into the table. Her large, 17 inch laptop computer is open in front of her and a pair of glasses she uses for distance rest, almost hidden, in her lap.

“Good evening everyone and welcome.”

SD: The professor walks from the blackboard to the small table covered in paper. Erin follows the professor’s voice with her eyes.

“I am so pleased you could all join me, (SD: The professor says smiling) so, here is how we are going to do things. (SD: She grabs hold of the back of the chair behind her table and leans forward). I like to use the blackboard as a way to keep track of the discussion in class. So, there will always be an agenda posted and as any of you speak, I will take notes of what I feel is important or anything that you should keep track of.”
SD: The professor walks over to the blackboard and writes something. Erin hears the sound of chalk on the blackboard indicating that the professor is no longer behind her table; she has moved. Erin turns her head to the sound of chalk on the blackboard.

“At the beginning of every class I will distribute photocopies of my handwritten notes on the readings.”

SD: The professor passes a stack of paper to Erin, she takes a copy and passes the pile to the chorus member on her right.

“This is my gift to you — read them and use them — I have put in my own personal time to do this.”

SD: The professor returns to her standing position behind the table covered with papers. Erin is delayed in her reaction, she moves her head to the sound of the professor as she moves paper.

“Now, I just want to inform you all that I have changed the reading list, we will be starting on week seven. I will have a revised copy of the syllabus for you all next week.”

SD: Erin’s head snaps up from her computer. The news of the changing reading list has thrown her, she looks around the room to see or hear if anyone else is reacting to this sudden news. Silence.

“Okay, so now that all that boring stuff is out of the way, I thought we would start with a
game, a get-to-know-you game!”

SD: The professor pulls out her rolling chair from behind her small table and sits down. The chorus shifts in their seats. The professor takes a drink of water from a plastic bottle and begins explaining the game.

“All right, so, we are going to start over here!”

SD: The professor gestures to her left, opposite Erin but she cannot see this. Erin looks left to right, trying to gage if the room is looking at her or at someone else. She pulls herself in tighter to the table, still attempting to figure out where in fact the game is starting.

“Starting with me?”

SD: A chorus member from across Erin asks with a mixture of surprise and enthusiasm. Erin’s eyes immediately dart to the sound of their voice.

“Yes, we are starting clockwise, moving around the room.”

SD: Erin sits back in her chair, a bit relieved.

“Each person will say their name and something they like that begins with the same first letter as their name. For example, I’m Theresa Trout.”

SD: The chorus chuckles as the professor continues.

“Each person will have to repeat the names of those that have spoken before them, ending with themselves. So, it’s a good thing to go first!”
SD: The professor laughs, looking at Erin. She meets her gaze and then looks around the room, realizing that she is last. Erin inhales, swallowing the air at the same time and lets out a noise of discomfort — she quickly chuckles joining in the laughter. She laughs, except her laughter does not bespeak amusement. The game begins and Erin’s attention is fractured. Her eyes shift between her computer and the chorus as their voices make their way around the room, drawing nearer to her. She is attempting to keep track of the game all while trying to send an email updating the library that there have been changes to the reading list.

“Okay, so that was Theresa Trout and I’m Luke Linguini.”

SD: A voice from across Erin says. She lifts her head in response and then returns her gaze to her computer. Once the email has been sent, she slowly sides a copy of the professor’s handwritten notes into her lap. She then reaches into her bag and takes out her reading glasses. She reaches quickly to her lap and grasps her distance glasses before they fall. This movement catches the attention of one of the members of the chorus.

“Chelsea Chips, Nadia Nachos, Trevor Tapioca…”

SD: The game continues. Erin quickly puts on her thick-rimmed glasses. She then leans forward into her lap to meet the piece of paper grasping her distance glasses once again. Laughter erupts; she quickly removes her glasses, a startled look on her face, breaths deeply and joins the others in their laughter. She pauses, puts her glasses back on and returns to her forward bend. She attempts to read what is on the handout.

“Stephanie Spaghetti, Laura Lamb, Omar Oreos…”
SD: The voices are getting closer. Erin quickly rips the glasses from her face and folds the paper on her lap being careful not to knock her distance glasses on the floor. She cannot make out what is written on the handout. She is visibly frustrated. She pauses. She listens, attempting to locate where in the horseshoe the voice is coming from. She turns her head to the right, holds her position and smiles. She waits, listening to the game and then slowly brings the distance glasses hidden in her lap to her face and puts them on. She then quickly turns to her left toward the blackboard and attempts to read what the professor had written in chalk earlier. She is focused on the blackboard. She leans forward, squinting and then removes her glasses. Her hand drops into her lap as she returns the glasses to their hiding place. She cannot see what is written on the blackboard. Once again, she is visibly frustrated.

“It’s your turn!”

SD: A voice from beside Erin says. She turns and sees a smiling face.

“Oh, right!” (SD: She stammers and lets out a nervous laugh. She looks at the professor). “Um, this is Theresa Trout and um, ah…”

SD: Erin turns to her right. She looks slightly frightened imagining all eyes are focused directly on her.

The chorus suddenly jumps up from their seats. They begin drumming on the table-tops in front of them. Their hands beat out a rhythm with intricate full body choreography. They begin moving around the horseshoe dancing and drumming on the desks. The professor remains seated at her table, writing notes; she takes no notice of the chorus. Erin remains seated. She watches stoically as the chorus moves with such rhythm and ease around her. As they move around the horseshoe,
the chorus, one at a time, pack up their belongings. They exit, vocalizing the rhythm they had been previously drumming on the desks. Erin watches as they leave. The professor continues writing, appearing not to notice what is going on in the classroom.

Erin slowly puts her laptop computer into her bag. She places her distance glasses, the ones hiding in her lap, into their case and into her bag. The only thing that remains on the table is the folded copy of the professor's notes. Erin looks at the professor, then at the folded notes in front of her and then back to the professor. Her face shows concern. She is not pleased with how the class went or how she presented herself. She lifts her bag off the floor as she stands and swings it over her shoulder. She tucks her rolling chair in to meet the table and reaches for the folded paper of handwritten notes. As she slides the paper off the desk into her hand she looks at the professor who is in the midst of packing her bag.

“Excuse me, (SD: Erin breaks the silence in the room, she takes a step closer to the professor) excuse me, professor?”

SD: Engrossed in the packing of her belongings, the professor reluctantly lifts her head, eyes stretching above the rims of her glasses.

“Yes?”

“Hi. (SD: Erin’s voice is a bit shaky, she is slightly intimidated by the professor). I’m Erin, ah, I’m the student you received the letter about.”

SD: The professor stares at Erin. She does not appear to know what she is referring to.

“From Accessibility Services… I’m the legally blind student…”
Erin exhales, smiles and shrugs her shoulders. She is a bit bewildered that the professor is not responding.

“Oh, yes, right, hello.”

The professor splits her attention between Erin and packing her bag.

“I just wanted to introduce myself, well, outside of the game. I’m sorry if it appeared as though I wasn’t interested in what the other students were saying or if it seemed like I wasn’t listening. I know I must have looked scattered. (Erin begins to ramble). I mean what a first impression! (She laughs awkwardly). I hope my first impression does not leave an impression, I mean, I’m sorry, I just, I just don’t want you to think I am like not a good student or that I am unprepared or anything. It’s just that, well, this class was particularly difficult for me —”

The professor smiles and nods her head, she stands looking at Erin.

“Not to worry, (The professor dismisses Erin) you will get the hang of things soon, I am sure.”

“Thank you but I am not sure if I will. Would it be okay —”

The professor moves toward Erin, smiling and nodding, gesturing her to walk as they move toward the threshold of the classroom door.
“Not to worry, (SD: The professor and Erin now stand, she in the threshold of the room, 
the professor just inside) next class you will feel much better, every new grad student 

experiences imposter syndrome.”

SD: The stage is suddenly dark. A small white spotlight instantly appears illuminating Erin still 
standing on the threshold, facing into the classroom.

SCENE IV

SD: The sound of the chorus laughing, talking etc. comes from offstage. Erin turns her head 
toward the wings of stage right. As the chorus burst from the wings, lights suddenly illuminate 
the stage. The chorus moves around Erin in a circle, dancing and cheering! She smiles as they 
hoist her into the air. Cheering her on, they carry her from the threshold into the classroom. The 
professor stands at the blackboard with her back toward the classroom. She takes no notice of 
the action behind her. She is writing the agenda for class on the blackboard in yellow chalk. The 
chorus pulls Erin’s chair out from the table and gently lower her into the seat. They continue to 
cheer and dance as they find their way to their seats.

Erin appears confident as she reaches into her bag and takes out her laptop computer. The 
chorus, now sitting, cheer as she does this. She smiles knowing that they are watching her every 
move. She slowly reaches into her bag, pausing, grinning at the chorus, almost toying with them. 
The chorus leans toward Erin and gasps. She looks at them and suddenly pulls her distance 
glasses from her bag and, smiling, thrusts them high above her head for all to see. The chorus 
erupts with applause as she places them on the table beside her computer. Once again, she 
reaches into her bag. The chorus leans toward her and gasp. She pauses, looks around the room
and waits. The chorus appears as if they are going to explode with anticipation. Suddenly, her arm shoots above her head revealing her reading glasses. The chorus jumps from their seats, some onto the desks in front of them others to their feet, cheering! Erin places them on the desk, stands and bows to the cheering class. The professor stops writing on the blackboard, her back remains turned to the students. The chorus and Erin freeze and turn their heads to face the professor’s back. The professor takes a step backward, looks at what she has written and then places the chalk on the silver ledge of the blackboard. As she turns to face the classroom, the chorus and Erin abruptly sit in their chairs and stare toward the front of the class.

“Good evening and welcome back.”

SD: The professor has a hint of hostility in her voice. Some of the chorus members chuckle attempting to keep straight faces. The professor walks over to Erin and hands her a stack of photocopied handwritten notes as she did in the previous class.

“Take one and pass it on. (SD: She says walking back to her table covered with paper. She sits) Once everyone has one, please take a minute to read it over, if you have any questions, please hang on to them until the class discussion.”

SD: The professor looks around the classroom, smiles, and then turns her gaze down to read silently from a paper in front of her.

Erin puts on her reading glasses and holds the handout an inch from her nose. Her face is completely blocked from view of the chorus as she attempts to read. The room is silent. One chorus member holds the handout with both hands, arms stretched out in front of them. Slowly,
they begin to rip the paper in half. The sound fills the room like a blast from a cannon. Despite this, the professor remains engrossed in her reading, taking no notice of anyone or anything in the room. Erin looks at the chorus member with wonder and surprise. She places the notes atop her closed laptop in front of her and takes her readings glasses off, setting them down on the table. The chorus member has now ripped the handout into tiny pieces. Cradling the pieces of paper in the palm of their hand, they stand on the desk, bring their hand to their mouth and blows. The paper bursts into their air, falling like confetti. Some chorus members applaud while others shake their heads disapprovingly. The chorus member spins on their feet and jumps down from atop the table. This performance has energized and inspired the other members of the chorus into performances of their own. Around the horseshoe shaped table, every chorus member engages in their own act of, as the professor instructed, “reading” the notes. One chorus member holds the notes by the top left corner with one hand while holding a lighter to the bottom opposite corner with the other. On the fourth attempt to spark a flame, the paper catches fire. Two members make paper airplanes, throwing them back and forth to each other, while others are engrossed in their readings, highlighting the pages and taking notes. Erin watches with amusement, applauding and gasping.

The professor clears her throat and looks at her watch. Suddenly, the chorus stops what they are doing and look at Erin. She sits up straight in response. In unison, the chorus slowly changes their focus, looking first at the notes in front of Erin, then to her face, and finally to the professor. They repeat this choreography as if encouraging Erin to do a paper trick of her own. The pace of the movement increases as the choreography continues. Erin catches on to what the chorus is attempting to tell her and she begins to participate in this choreography.
She looks at the chorus as they look at her and together, with dizzying speed, they all look back and forth from the notes in front of her to the professor. Just as this choreography reaches a frenzy that seems no longer possible, Erin’s right hand reaches for the notes.

“Um, professor?”

SD: Erin’s voice brings an abrupt halt to the frenzied choreography and to the professor’s reading. The chorus scatters back into their seats and resume reading the handout.

The professor turns to look at Erin. There is a delay in her facial reaction, as if she is reminding herself as to who Erin is. She pauses. A look comes over her face showing that she now remembers who Erin is. She smiles and rolls in her chair from her table at the front of the room over to meet Erin. They are both now eye-to-eye.

“Yes.”

SD: The professor has an odd smile on her face. The chorus watches as Erin speaks.

“Do you think that you could send me a scanned copy of the handout the day before class, or even the morning of? It’s just that I can’t see it.”

“You cannot see this, in front of you?”

SD: The professor picks up the notes that lay on Erin’s laptop between them. She holds them in her left hand in front of Erin, questioning her claim. The chorus shake their heads in disbelief.

This has happened before. I can walk into a room and scan the space. I can find my seat, sit at a computer, move my head “following” the speaker, see the light pouring into the room and
know that it is too bright all while blind. I know what she, and all professors, expect of students, I know they expect sight. So, I give them sight until I can give no more.

“Ah, no. I, (SD: Erin clears her throat) I am blind. I don’t have any central vision so it’s really quite impossible for me to see the notes this way and read them.”

*SD: The chorus silently cheers Erin on. Some give her thumbs up, others mime clapping and a few jump from their seats and throw their hands in the air.*

“Right, right… (SD: The professor interjects, smiling and nodding her head). Well, this is the way I do things. I mean sometimes I write the notes before class so I really don’t think I can get them any earlier to you.”

*SD: The chorus freezes. They look at the professor smiling at Erin and then to each other. They cannot believe what they are hearing. Some begin whispering to each other, others drop their heads and shake them from side to side. Erin is thrown by the professor’s response. She attempts to keep her cool as she continues.*

“Okay, ah, I tried using my distance glasses for the board but I just can’t make any of it out. Do you think you could say out loud what you are writing, that way I could follow it?”

*SD: Silence. The professor blinks several times before responding.*

“I just don’t think I will remember. I could try but I, I just don’t see it happening.”
“Okay… I, I am just wondering if there is a place for me in this classroom? I mean I don’t want to fall behind but honestly —”

“Well, (SD: The professor is still smiling and nodding) that is something you are just going to have to figure out for yourself.”

SD: The professor rolls back to her table leaving Erin startled and lost for words. She sits, motionless, staring into her oil spot. The chorus is a buzz, whispering to each other, pointing at the professor, gesturing to Erin; they cannot believe what they have witnessed.

“Excuse me! (SD: The professor says loudly). Excuse me, hi, I have a quick announcement to make. (SD: She stands with her head lowered, one hand stretched high in the air, the other perched on her hip). Erin here, (SD: The professor’s hand in their air falls, gesturing toward Erin) Erin is blind and has requested that I read what is on the board as I write it.”

SD: Erin’s attention is jolted from her thoughts to the professor. She turns to look at the classroom, meeting the gaze of every chorus member. The attention of the room is on Erin. A look of horror comes over her face. Her face tells of her horror — it says not yet, not now and, not this way — she is visibly upset. Erin looks from the professor to the classroom in disbelief. Her heartbeat quickens, the movement of her chest and ribcage shows that she is taking quick shallow breaths. Some of the faces of the chorus members show concern for Erin while others are focused on the professor.
“So, could you all try to remind me to do this? I am sure Erin would appreciate it.”

*SD:* The professor looks at Erin and smiles. Erin turns her face away from the professor and looks at the classroom. She takes a deep breath and smiles.

“Great. Now that we have *that* taken care of, we can begin. Now would be a good time to get your readings out.”

*SD:* The professor smiles at the class. Erin sits hunched over staring into her oil spot.

“Erin?”

*SD:* The professors voice causes Erin to jump slightly.

“Did I see this week’s readings on your computer, there?”

“Ah, yeah, yes I do, I’ve got them right here.”

*SD:* Erin looks at the screen in front of her, slightly confused.

“Great, do you mind?”

*SD:* The professor rolls over in her chair beside Erin, gesturing to the screen.

“Oh, oh yeah, no for sure, yeah go ahead.”

“Thanks, I forgot mine. Oh, this is a different version.”

*SD:* The professor looks at Erin with slight annoyance.

“Yup, the library never got back to me so I had to find this one online.”
SD: The professor audibly exhales.

“So that means the page numbers are going to be different from the rest of the class, great, I’ll have to remember that as well.”

SD: Erin smiles. The class discussion begins. The professor stands up and walks to the blackboard. She begins writing as one chorus member is talking, Erin is focused on her computer. The chorus member to the right of Erin with whom she shares her desk leans in and whispers.

“I was just thinking, maybe you should get your eyes checked, like maybe you need a new prescription or something?”

SD: Erin takes a deep breath and turns to meet the smiling face of a concerned classmate. Her heartbeat slows. She is no longer horrified, there is a calm focus to her behaviour.

“I have. Glasses don’t help much but thanks!”

“Really? … Maybe you need to see someone else?”

“Maybe, but for now, I need to find a new class.”

SD: Blackout. Curtain.
THEORETICAL INTERMISSION

As is the case with medicine, it is almost superfluous to point out the connection between blindness and education as the two are inexorably tied to one another since at least the late Enlightenment in the history of the West (Stiker, 1997). Contemporary times understands blindness as a deficit and as a lack, but not only of eyesight. Blindness is understood as generating a disadvantage for those of us who are blind. We are understood to be disadvantaged by our blindness in relation to learning a trade, we cannot become electricians or plumbers. We are understood to be disadvantaged by our blindness in relation to learning a profession, we cannot become a pilot or an eye doctor. We cannot learn the trades and professions that are open to our sighted peers and so, in this way, we are also disadvantaged by blindness. Blindness is often understood as and defined by what it cannot learn and do. Indeed, blindness is often understood, even in contemporary times, as preventing much more than it offers. Add to this, the importance that education holds in contemporary times as a way to “get ahead” and to “make a living,” blindness becomes understood as even more disadvantageous and is requiring some form of education in order to ameliorate this disadvantage. Paradoxically, blindness is a disadvantage in education and yet, it is understood as in need of more education.

In this way, the “problem of blindness” is conceived of as something that can be resolved with education. Education, of course, is conducted in many ways and comes in many forms. Still, the social organization of education rests upon the enquiring eye, the eye that sees. Blindness thus becomes a phenomenon that is inherently in need of education since sight is absent. It does not know, it cannot see and so, it must learn. It must be educated and it must come to learn and understand the world as sighted. This is the first lesson blindness must learn.
Such a lesson has come in the form of segregated schools for the blind in Canada, such as, the Halifax School for the Blind (formally the Halifax Asylum for the Blind) 1871-1975 (APSEA, 2018) and the W. Ross McDonald School (formally the Ontario Institution for the Education of the Blind) 1872-present (Brown, 2018). Although the “bricks and mortar” segregation of blind students in education is, for the most part, no longer common practice, the lesson is still the same. Blind students are now “schooled in and by sight” in such educational programs as immersion, special education, and most recently, inclusion. Despite the difference in educational practices the lesson is the same as it was in segregated schools, namely, that sight provides for the only reality. This “reality” is the foundation of education and assumes that all students are sighted, or should be.

“Like the air we breathe,” says Michalko (2001) “sight is everywhere in [the] classroom, and like the air, it is not noticed and not even seen” (p.352). Sight “unseen” and “unnoticed” is the cultural manifestation of sight since the only thing noticeable is signs of sight, but not sight itself. To notice signs of sight, like the blackboard and chalk or, to see that sight is required in order to read a photocopy of handwritten notes would suggest that sight is not something directly ready-at-hand. To notice or see sight would hint at the fact that sight may not be present in its usual unnoticeable way. Recall Erin standing on the threshold of the classroom.

Before she entered the room, her blindness saw sight everywhere. Sight oriented the design of the room. Long tables arranged in a horseshoe shape marked the distance that was the barrier between Erin and the blackboard, her fellow students and the professor. Uncovered windows that allowed for natural light to pour into the room became a source of glaring pain that interrupted her focus. The lack of access to print material, the gateway to education, foiled her attempts to be a student “just like” every other in the room. “Get-to-know-you games,” so easily
engaged in by the other students, games to encourage facial recognition and memory exposed her blindness. Her blindness was now something to *be seen*; she was a sight to be noticed, a rarity in the classroom. Before Erin crossed the threshold her blindness not only saw sight but felt it too. The light nudges of her classmates as they rushed passed her into the classroom represented sight unseen and unnoticed. They were sighted; they were expected. It was as though they inhaled sight, exhaled vision and, much like the air we breathe, did not notice or even see that they were doing so. Erin, in contrast, noticed sight and noticed it everywhere.

Even though the students and the professor neither see nor notice sight, they do see and notice blindness. One of the sights there is for sight to see and notice is its absence and blindness is the quintessential representation of this absence. But, like sight, blindness is not seen directly; it is noticed through the conceptions of it that exist and circulate in culture, i.e., in what might be called, sighted conceptions of blindness (Sandahl & Auslander, 2005; Healey, 2017; Kudlick, 2005; Michalko, 1998). It is this sense of blindness that occupy spaces such as education. Theorists such as David Bolt (2014, 2018), Martin Jay (1994) and David Michael Levin (1997) represent ways in which blindness is understood as the absence of sight and how sight typically sees blindness only in this way.

Erin stands on the threshold of the classroom facing a sighted space replete with conceptions of blindness. She is blind. She is crossing over a threshold into conceptions of herself. It is as though she is already in the classroom before she arrives. Linda Martin Alcoff (2006) speaks of entering a space that is already occupied when, what she refers to as a “non-white” enters the classroom,
[It] is as if one finds oneself in the world ahead of oneself, the space one occupies as already occupied. One’s lived self is effectively dislodged when an already outlined but very different self appears to be operating in the same exact location. (p.193)

Alcoff’s formulation of space in relation to race finds an application in other marginalized groups, including blind people. Conceptions of blindness do exist in our culture, as I have already shown and these conceptions do occupy all cultural places, including university classrooms. Alcoff’s work is not only instructive in relation to blindness, but also illustrative of the kind of difficulty that marginalization presents to those of us who experience it. It does, as Alcoff says, get ahead of us.

Erin stands on the threshold about to enter a space, in Alcoff’s terms, “already occupied” by blindness. It is already in the classroom into which she is about to enter. Erin enters the classroom as a “lived self” as, a lived-blind-self and from her experience moving in other cultural spaces, she enters the space of the classroom anticipating her “lived self” being “dislodged.” This anticipation marks the source of her anxiety. She is anticipating the presence of a very different blind-self waiting for her. This “different self” is “operating in the same exact location” as sight does and this always “already outlined self” is a powerful presence. The presence of blindness that occupies the classroom is so powerful that any appearance of a blind person is framed by the self already waiting in the classroom.

Blindness is rarely anticipated in cultural spaces including classrooms. This is so even when a letter is sent by Accessibility Services notifying a professor that a blind person will be part of their class. This contradiction makes sense in that the blindness expected in the classroom was the one that was already there and not the one that entered. Indeed, the arrival of blindness in
this particular classroom was not only interpreted as an unexpected presence but also as an imposter. The blindness that appeared in the classroom was not the blindness that the professor had in mind. Erin could see a little, she moved to her seat without assistance, she did not possess the technology assumed to make blackboards, handwritten notes, etc., accessible to her. This blind student was an imposter. She was not the lived-blind-self that already lived in the classroom.

Recall that in Scene III, Erin waits until the other students have left the room before attempting to engage with the professor. She is concerned about how she appeared during class, the type of impression she gave of herself as a blind student. The conversation is structured around Erin explaining herself to the professor and struggling to express how her blindness did not yet have a place in the classroom. Blindness was indeed an occupant in the space but not her blindness. The professor could not understand that the ways in which she conducted the classroom operated with the assumption that sight was a prerequisite. The only way she could make sense of Erin was to evoke a popular psychological theory that other sighted graduated students may have experienced, namely, “imposter syndrome.” The professor reaffirmed the first lesson that blindness must learn, she told Erin that she will “get the hang of things.” Getting the hang of things, of course, meant doing things, despite her blindness, in a sighted way. The professor wanted Erin to do blindness and to be blind her way, the way in which blindness already occupied her classroom space. The professor could not imagine anything other than blindness understood as a person fitting neatly, without difficulty, into a sighted reality, blindness understood in the terms of education spaces, as a thing to which a person must adjust to and come to terms with.
The classroom’s threshold represented both entry into the room and entry into the realm of sight that marked the room as a cultural space. This space also included its opposite — a conception of blindness and what it means and “looks like” to be blind. Erin did not present herself in such a way that appeared to the professor and students as blind. She did not wear dark glasses, she did not use a white cane, she did not have a guide dog and, perhaps most puzzling, she was in the classroom and made her own way in. When Erin crossed the threshold into the classroom, a version of blindness awaited her. It is as though conceptions of blindness haunted the classroom. Erin fell victim not to the blindness haunting the classroom but to the blindness existing as a lived reality in the classroom. And yet, the meaning of blindness is unending despite cultural space’s attempt to end its meaning with the invocation of its own conception of blindness. The meaning of blindness is not over and this is what haunts the classroom. As Avery Gordon (2008) says in her discussion of slavery, “such endings that are not over is what haunting is all about” (p.139).

There are, as Michalko (1999) points out and I will discuss further in the Epilogue, “many blindesses” (p.180). The “many” of blindness suggests that, like sight, blindness is all around us. It exists and circulates in a culture that privileges those sights which are visible. It suggests too that blindness permeates cultural spaces beyond the doctor’s office and the classroom, haunting all cultural spaces. This ever-present spectre lingers, haunting the many selves of both sight and blindness. In other words, blindness haunts sight and itself as well as their co-mingling, their relations live in a multitude of conceptions both of blindness as well as sight. When blindness moves through and in cultural spaces it generates the noticeability of both what it means to be sighted and blind. This noticeability, in turn, provides the opportunity for sight and blindness to be “seen” as more than biology. What this more becomes, depends upon
the interests of those doing the noticing. Nonetheless, cultural spaces are also the places haunted
by sight and the spectre of its opposite. I now turn to another cultural space, the street, as a way
to further explore this noticeability and haunting.
ACT III

BLINDNESS IN THE STREET

SCENE I

SD: The stage is dark. A loud automated voice announces, “Arriving at Rosedale, Rosedale Station.” The chime like sound of automated subway doors opening is heard followed by a flood of noise and movement on stage. From the darkness we hear muffled talking, laughter, the faint sounds of music, the rustling of people and their belongings shifting and moving, “excuse me” and “sorry” are repeated many times with a sudden loud call of, “hold the doors!” Lights slowly begin to fade up with the sound of the subway doors closing and a loud automated voice announcing, “The next station is Bloor, Bloor Station.”

A crowd of chorus members stand forming roughly two parallel lines downstage center. They rock their bodies slightly back and forth in a bouncing rhythm suggesting that they are on a moving subway car. At both ends of the rectangle there are two chairs side by side facing in toward the chorus. Four members of the chorus sit in these chairs, two at each end. One member is reading from a book, another wears headphones while focusing their look on their phone, the third member is biting their nails while the fourth sits, clutching their backpack hunched over asleep, their head bobbing to the movement of the train.

The automated voice announces, “Arriving at Bloor, Bloor Station.” The chorus collectively sway their upper bodies to the right and then jerk to the left indicating that the train has come to a stop. The sound of the subway doors opening is heard as the actors spill from the subway car down from the stage and into the audience disappearing. This chaotic mass exodus ends
revealing Erin standing in the subway car facing the audience. The sound of the subway doors closing leaves Erin and a handful of chorus members, some standing, some sitting, on the train. The automated voice announces, “The next station is Wellesley, Wellesley Station.” Erin looks around the car and notices an open seat to her right. She walks over and sits just as the train begins to move. As she sits, her eyes begin to wander. The chorus all seem to be preoccupied in one way or another. Some are on their phones, others are reading from books, a few chorus members stand, their gaze just above their heads, staring. Erin’s head is now slightly tilted to the right with her gaze finding a resting place just to the right across from her. She sits, appearing to be lost in her thoughts unaware that she is now staring at the chorus member biting their nails.

The chorus member notices Erin and immediately stops biting their nails. She continues staring. The member displays a sense of discomfort and turns their body away from Erin glancing in her direction. Almost in frustration, they look directly at Erin, widen their eyes and shoot her a look as if to say, “What are you looking at?” Erin does not respond. The chorus member shifts in their seat. Erin gently rubs her cheek absentmindedly, shifts in her seat and continues to stare. Some of the other members of the chorus begin to notice this interaction. The member looks at Erin again, this time clearing their throat. Erin does not change the position of her gaze. The sound of the automated voice announces, “Arriving at Queen, Queen Station.” The member gets up, walks toward the door and stops in front of Erin. She sits up straight in her seat and tucks her feet under the chair to make room for the member to stand. The member shakes their head and mutters, “unbelievable.”

The sound of the subway doors opening is heard and the member of the chorus leaves in a huff. Erin appears a bit confused, looking around the train to see if anyone else is aware of what just happened. Some of the chorus members look up from their reading, some even smirk. Erin does
not notice. She sits, appearing a little confused and unsure of what just happened. She folds her hands into her lap and looks down at them.

One of the many intricacies of being blind, a particularly unsettling one, is knowing what to do with your eyes and when. A sense of invisibility often accompanies being blind. It is as if being blind evokes a sense of being invisible to others, as if we forget that we are indeed visible. This is not so much a feeling of isolation, although it can be, as it is a detached sense of being in the world. Being blind often evokes a sense of being there without being there.

SD: Lights fade to black.

SCENE II

SD: The stage is illumined by a flash of rainbow coloured lights that instantly change to white. Erin remains seated on the subway still looking at her hands folded in her lap. The chorus remains in their spots, preoccupied with their phones, books, etc. Erin slowly raises her head and begins to look around. She notices the other passengers and a look of curiosity comes over her face. She suddenly looks down at her hands once more as if catching herself before anyone spied her looking at them. She waits a few seconds. The automated voice announces, “Arriving at Union, Union Station.” The chimes of the subway doors opening sound. At this sound Erin raises her head and looks around the car. Her eyes pause on an passenger looking at their phone. A look of curiosity emerges on her face once again. She quickly looks away. Erin adopts a posture of discomfort appearing not to know where to look. She looks down at her hands once again and shifts slightly in her seat, glancing up to check if anyone is looking at her. Her discomfort grows. Suddenly she has a thought and methodically reaches into her bag and pulls out a book. Put differently, she suddenly has a thought of doing sight and methodically does it.
The sensation of being there without being there is a tricky way of being in the world and
blindness has its particular way of expressing this. Of course, such a sensation is not restricted to
those who are blind since we can experience ourselves as marginalized in many ways each of
which has its particular sensation of being there without being there. Blindness may be
understood and may even generate an exaggerated experience of such a sensation. It is a
hyperbolic sensation of that experience. You are there without being there. There and yet
somehow you are not there. How is it that you are not there? You are not the kind of person that
is expected. You must act like you are sighted since you cannot take being there sighted for
granted. You must “partner up” with the “look of sight” and act as if sight is not your partner but
is instead who and what you are. This is the ground of passing. Being there means being sighted
and this means there is no need to pass as such even though there is a need to show others
through interaction that you are sighted. Sight is not biological in how people move through life;
they act as though they can see and they do but to be seen as seeing, sighted people show each
other, through interaction, that they see. In this sense, they pass as sighted. Blind people, in
contrast, intentionally pass. We act as if we belong. A country of the blind exists only in such
fiction as H.G. Wells’ (1904) *The Country of the Blind*, while the country of the sighted is a
country which does not require fictionalizing. Being there while not being there is the fiction of
the narrative that blindness is included in the world. This is a fiction maintained by both blind
and sighted people.

*SD: Erin places the book on her lap. She swipes the palm of her right hand across the cover as if
she were wiping away dust. She takes a deep breath and, once more, scans the subway car. She
shifts in her seat and opens the book. She slowly lifts her eyes from the pages of the book, scans
the car and returns to her book. She shifts once more and turns the page. She stares. The*
automated voice announces, “The next station is Osgoode, Osgoode Station.” Slowly, she begins to run her right pointer finger along the top right corner edge of the book and then slightly down the right side, forming an upside down and backwards “L” shape. She repeats this motion as she sits and stares at the book. She moves her head slightly from the left page to the right, careful not to linger to long on one page. The automated voice announces, “Arriving at Queen’s Park. Queen’s Park Station.” The sound of the doors opening is followed by a few passengers entering the car. A member of the chorus standing to the left of Erin moves to make room for the new arrivals. They shimmy past Erin and with one hand they furtively turn the book right-side-up in Erin’s lap. The chorus member continues shimmying down the car without looking back. Erin freezes in her seat. A look of terror comes over her face — the book was upside down the whole time (or was it?)! She frantically looks about the car apparently trying to discern whether other passengers noticed the book was upside down. She closes the book and rests it on her lap. Her breathing is quick and shallow. She turns to the right to see if she can spot the chorus member who subtly corrected her. She scans the car but cannot make out any individual characteristics of the passengers. She squints her eyes attempting to sharpen her gaze. She sits back in her seat, closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She looks at the book resting on her lap and then around the subway car. The passengers appear as they were earlier, preoccupied with their phones, books etc. Erin closes her eyes and breaths slowly. Both her palms are now resting on the book. She pulls her fingers in toward her palms as her fingernails run slowly down the cover of her book. “The next station is St. George, St. George Station.” The announcement cuts into Erin’s focused breathing and thoughts. She opens her eyes, replaces the book into her bag and stands. She adjusts her shirt and bag and takes one last look around the car. Her face and posture bespeaks a nervous energy. The chime like sound of the doors opening acts as the starter
pistol for Erin. She speeds out of the subway car down from the stage and into the audience, disappearing.

Bright rainbow coloured lights suddenly swirl around the stage and audience. Loud sounds of street noise is heard: people talking, car horns honking, engines accelerating, people yelling, the ting-ting of bicycle bells, dogs barking, etc. The crescendo of these sounds reaches its apex as the lights change to complete darkness. The stage is empty leaving the audience in silent darkness.

SCENE III

SD: A morning sun slams Erin as she emerges from the subway station. She feels it only in her eyes. She squints her eyes and scrunches her face in response as she brings her right hand up to her bowline, shielding her eyes from the sun’s rays. She walks rapidly with the same nervous energy she experienced as she left the subway. A crowd of people sanding by a hotdog cart opposite a four way intersection is in her path. Erin stops. She takes a few steps to the curb on her left. Finding a post, she leans against it. The city becomes a gigantic mass of movement and sound careening by and around her. Still shielding her eyes from the South-East mid-morning sun, she takes a deep breath. The nervous energy she felt from the subway has left her a bit rattled. She reaches into her bag and pulls out her sunglasses. She puts them on and takes a quick scan of the street. The sun penetrates her glasses making her squint once again. She raises her right hand to block the sun. She takes a deep breath. Springing from her resting place as if making a decision, she walks through the crowd at the hotdog cart.

She stops at the curb just before the sidewalk dips down to meet the pavement of the street. Standing and looking straight ahead, Erin looks for the glowing white image of the walk sign
across the street but cannot quite make it out. She turns to her right to see if she can spot the
glowing orange image of the don’t walk sign but she cannot locate it either. She looks right to
left. Pausing, she closes her eyes trying to get a sense of the traffic flow. The cars to her left are
stopped but she is unsure for how long they will remain this way. She turns to her right to see if
anyone is crossing the street. Except for the crowd of people just behind her at the hotdog cart,
there is no one there. She is alone. Frustrated, she moves her head from side to side bouncing
slowly on the balls of her feet.

As if out of thin air, a group of people (the chorus) appear and surround her. They are dressed in
bright colours, some holding open parasols while others play brass instruments. They look and
behave like a New Orleans “Second Line Parade.” They begin moving across the street
dancing and holding their open parasols to the sound of the brass jazz that they are playing.
Erin’s eyes widen as she takes in the scene. With a bit of a hop, skip and a sort of run, she dashes
out into the street directly behind them. One of the chorus members turns around extending their
arm toward Erin as if encouraging her to come along with them. Erin smiles at them in such a
way that suggests that the gesture is not needed since she is already moving with them.

Once across the street, the parade turns left and continues down the street past Erin’s favourite
coffee shop. She stops and stands watching them as they move along the street. Taking a deep
breath, she smiles. She appears as if a sense of calm has come over her. She turns slowly and

---

15 New Orleans Second Line Parades, “range in size, level of organization and traditions, but in
all cases they will include a brass band, jubilant dancing in the street and members decked out in
a wardrobe of brightly coloured suits, sashes, hats and bonnets, parasols and banners, melding
the pomp of a courtly function and the spontaneous energy of a block party […] they are
generally held for their own sake and to let the good times roll.” (McNulty, n.d.).
looks back at the street she has just crossed. Still smiling, she turns away and walks toward the doors of the coffee shop. As she enters, the faint sounds of the brass instruments are heard.

The heartbeat of a blind person moving in the street is contrapuntal to the rhythm of the street. Both rhythms represent a melody, but a melody different from one another. The rhythm of blindness is sometimes contrapuntal with that of the city or any other environment and at other times discordant. Blindness forces a blind person to “figure out” (almost always by hearing and feeling) the rhythm of the city; a traffic flow, the pedestrian flow, the rhythm of the sound, the rhythmic movement of the city. Sometimes an environmental rhythm presents an opportunity for the blind person to know the space through which she is moving. Whether forced or an opportunity, the rhythm of movement persists. Of this rhythm Michel de Certeau (1988) says, “[t]hey walk — an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (p. 158).

There is a rhythm to the street. This rhythm is composed of the footsteps of those who experience it. They are, to use de Certeau worlds, “walkers,” traveling through the “thicks and thins,” the twists and turns of a city they compose through the movement and sounds of their steps. These steps pound out compressed patterns of movement that form the rhythm of the city in which they move. Such a movement is experienced through the “elementary” act of walking — they “walk.” They walk through the city. They are walkers. They are the city. They are the rhythm without being able to hear or feel it. The rhythm of the city is often taken-for-granted and not heard and felt by those who “write” it. To walk in the city is to harmonize with its rhythm.
This harmony is disrupted by blindness. Blindness interrupts the repetition of movement making those who write the rhythm bump into blind people saying such things as, “oh, sorry, I didn’t see you there.” Such encounters reveal the differences between writing the rhythm and feeling the rhythm. Blind people feel the rhythm written in the city, a rhythm we rarely write. In this sense, blindness may be heard and felt as a manifestation of the poetics of movement. The sensation of the rhythm, how people are moving, at what pace and in what directions they are traveling creates a flow, a rhythm that is felt. Who knew there were such rhythms to the street and of the city? As Manning (2000) muses, “Blind people know. Blind had to have known all along” (Weights). When blind people ignore their own rhythm and move to the one on the street — we pass. We become part of the flow careful not to get in anyone’s way so as not to cause a disruption. When blindness passes we experience the elementary form of the city. We do not “write the text” or compose the melody but are absorbed into it. We disappear with our rhythm into the “thicks and thins” of a “text,” a rhythm, we did not write but can read quite well. There is an intimacy between blindness and the street. At times we are one with and at other times we are detached from the rhythm of the street haunted by a different rhythm, one which is contrapuntal at best, discordant at worst. Such a haunting may be the melody of our own steps but to move with such a rhythm would require blindness to shed the cadence of the street. Such a move from one rhythm to another is not something that is simply just done or not done. The rhythm of blindness is polyrhythmic. It takes some time to get the feel of it.
SCENE IV

SD: With the sound of the brass band fading in her ears, Erin opens the doors to the coffee shop and enters. The sounds of coffee cups hitting the marble tops of tables, the electric grinder turning beans into coffee grounds, the hint of music through the shop’s speaker system, the clash of cutlery, the voices and movement of people and their things bounce off the walls and into the ears of Erin. The shop is busy today, she can feel it. Smiling, she takes a few steps toward the line-up of people waiting to place their orders. Glancing toward the tables, she looks to see if there are any open spaces. Being across the street from the university she attends, she is also listening for any voices she might recognize. Squinting through her sunglasses she cannot see a free table. Taking her place at the end of the line-up she pushes her sunglasses from her nose up to the top of her head, leaving them there. As she stands in line Erin prepares to place her order. She reaches into her bag and takes out her wallet holding it in her left hand. With the same hand, she pulls one side of her bag open. With the right hand she digs deep into her bag, moving things around, appearing to look for something. The line moves and she is next. As she approaches the counter she splits her focus between the barista and her bag.

“Hey, good morning, (SD: Smiling) how are you?”

“Not too bad thanks, what can I get you?”

SD: The barista has a pleasant tone of routine to his voice. Erin continues to split her focus, looking down into her bag and then up at the barista.

“Can I get a tall pike in a grandee cup and I think I will have a heated cranberry tea biscuit as well, mix things up a bit! (SD: She smiles at the barista). Oh and is the soy
milk on the bar?”

SD: Erin turns her gaze down and continues looking in her bag.

“Sure is.”

SD: The amount Erin owes appears on the screen just above the cash register. The barista stands quietly waiting for her to pay. She looks up at the barista, flashes a quick smile, returns to looking in her bag and then up once more at the barista.

“Sorry, I can’t seem to find my glasses, (SD: With a bit of a chuckle) can you tell me how much it is?”

“Oh no! I would be blind as a bat without mine, I hope you find them!”

SD: They both share a knowing laugh.

“It’s $6.50.”

SD: Erin taps her debit card on the machine, paying. The two smile once more as she moves a few steps to the left and waits at the bar for her order. She turns to face the tables. Her eyes scan the room from left to right but she is standing too far away from the tables to notice any gaps of space where a free seat might be. As she waits, she begins humming the rhythm that the brass band played as she crossed the street. A look of contemplation moves across her face and through her body. In the busyness of the coffee shop Erin stands out. She is still and calm, appearing as if she were lost in another world detached from that of the coffee shop. Still quietly humming, she wonders, how will she find a table without revealing her blindness? She scrunches
her face slightly, as if answering her own question. Through her humming she hears a muffled voice and turns to face the bar.

“Miss, miss excuse me, is this your order?”

SD: A different barista from before is holding a coffee cup in one hand and a plate with a tea biscuit on it in the other. Erin looks directly at the barista with a pleasant neutrality splashed across her face.

“Um, is this yours?”

SD: Both stand waiting, the barista for a response, Erin for affirmation from him that it is her order, an order the details of which she cannot make out.

“Is this yours, a tall pike in a Grande cup with a heated cranberry tea biscuit?”

SD: Erin smiles with a look of relief.

“That’s me! Thanks.”

SD: The barista places the order on the bar. She picks it up and turns around to discover the members of the brass band (the chorus) standing in front of her. The coffee shop comes to a complete stop as if frozen in time. Erin stands looking at them and they at her. A look of serenity comes over her. She smiles. Her eyes sparkle in the light with a hint of moisture in them. She takes a deep breath.

“Hi…”
SD: The band members smile at her. Taking another deep breath she steps forward and, with sudden sound and movement, the room springs back to life. Erin and the band members walk toward a free table in the middle of the coffee shop. Erin sits and the band members gather behind her. She looks inquisitively over her shoulder at them and then focuses on her coffee. The same inquisitive look remains on her face as she slowly sips her coffee. The inquisitive look melts slowly from her face and is replaced by one of contemplation. A smile gradually fills her face as she looks once more over her shoulder . . .

Blackout. Curtain.
THEORETICAL INTERMISSION

It takes some time to get the feel of blindness. Such a feel requires attention to detail and the comprehensive knowledge and mastery of the rhythm of the street, the rhythm of life. Such a rhythm is derived from “normative expectations” that, with repetition in social spaces such as the street, are broadcast as “righteously presented demands” (Goffman, 1963 p. 2) of what ought to be. These taken-for-granted demands orient one’s sense of belonging in the street. To be at one with the rhythm would suggest that such demands or expectations that go unnoticed but are fulfilled without even thinking. Such demands may be understood as the assumption that all people on the street see what all people on the street see. The invocation of this expectation or demand is the oft heard chiding of, “what are you, blind?” to someone on the street who does not appear as discordant (the look of blindness) but does not seem to be in harmony with its rhythm. As I showed earlier, blindness is polyrhythmic. It is the simultaneous presence and absence of blindness and sight together with their rhythms. The street presents an opportunity for blindness to harmonize with its rhythm or to take on a contrapuntal relation to its beat.

For blindness to harmonize with the rhythm of the street is to find harmony in the street. This is to be at one with its demands and expectations. One way for blindness to find such a harmony is to pass as sighted. The sociological phenomenon of “passing” allows for the individual to achieve a certain persona, identity or “look”\(^\text{16}\). “Its [passing’s] interest” as Michalko (1998) says, “is in looking like everyone else and not standing out” (p.103). The rhythm of the street has a look. Its look is characterized by the ease with which it is performed.

\(^{16}\) Initial articulations of passing as a sociological phenomenon can be found in Goffman (1964) and in Garfinkel (1967).
This ease is the precision of sight. The subtle glances and movements that come with a sense of belonging. A belonging rooted in an ownership by those who are the rhythm. The street is there to be seen and seen by those who move in its thick and thins, its twists and turns. Sight has a specific look. Recall Erin on the subway car and her curiosity about the other passengers. They all appeared as if they were engrossed in the subtle act of looking; they were all doing sight. They all expressed an ease of belonging. Some were reading, others were on their phones and a few focused their gaze on specific areas of the car making sure not to make eye contact with any other passenger. They all, in their own way, showed each other that they could see. For a blind person to pass in the street, we need to show all of these things and more. We need to show that we can see what everyone else sees and in the same way while concealing that we cannot. We need to look like we are the rhythm by feeling it. Thus, looking like the “look” is one of the many ways blindness passes.

Blindness looking like it can see is how it is absorbed into the rhythm of the street. When Erin walked down the street and through the crowd by the hotdog cart to the curb her blindness was concealed — she passed as a sighted person. To others on the street she looked like she belonged. In the coffee shop Erin, once again, withdrew her blindness and evoked the character of forgetful eyes as opposed to blind ones. The purchase of a coffee and tea biscuit provided the opportunity for the performance of sight. That is, she passed as if she could see. Forgetful eyes, being without one’s glasses, is a riff off the melody of sight. It is not the rhythm of the street but it does complement it. Glasses belong. Blindness does not. For blind people to be in harmony with or to riff off the melody of the street requires an explicit performance. Blindness takes on the role of sight, acting in such a way that suggests that being sighted is
crucial to the identity of the person that they are presenting to the world (Butler, 2011). Blindness performs sight so as not to “stand out,” but to belong.

The role of not standing out and passing is a performance that is also performative. There is a performative quality to the performance of blindness passing as sight. Judith Butler (2011) illuminates how gender is performative, and this may be useful in exploring the performativity of blindness. Butler says,

To say that gender is performative is a little different because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or of being a woman […] we act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that’s simply true about us, a fact about us. Actually it’s a phenomenon that’s being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. (Butler, 2011, n.p.).

Butler’s exploration of gender as performative is useful when considering blindness and sight as not merely an “internal reality” or “fact about us” but instead as a cultural creation. Imagining how blindness and sight is performative allows us to treat both as cultural “phenomen[a] being produced all the time and being reproduced all the time.” The “internal reality” and “facts” of sight are understood as such only when performed as such. They do not exist on their own, or as naturally. Internal reality, or any reality, along with any facts, are understood as such only when we act as though they exist naturally.

Such productions, as Butler says, produce a “series of effects.” When blind people pass as sighted we effectively and affectively erase our difference. Through performing sight or passing, we conceal our blindness so as to take on the appearance of someone who belongs in the
street, namely, a sighted person. We disappear with our rhythm into that of the street. We behave in such a way that “consolidates an impression of being” on the street that shows blindness as absent, that it is not present in the rhythm of the street, the rhythm of life. This is one of the haunting characteristics of blindness, to be understood as absent when we are present. What sounds harmonic is actually discordant.

When we (blind people) pass, like Erin on the street or in the subway car, we reproduce the cultural conception that blindness is in some way unusual, that it does not belong. The presence of blindness in the street understood as unusual creates the “effect” that it is in some way, in Goffman’s (1963) terms, a stigma. The unusual character of blindness in the street is “seen” as discordant, as other, as stigma. When we pass we reproduce this phenomenon. Recall Erin’s terror when she discovered she was holding the book upside down on the subway car. The rhythm of her terror was contrapuntal to that of the street. She could feel the rhythm of the street and was in some ways passing but the haunting and immediate presence of her mistake, the upside-down book, unearthed the rhythm of her blindness to her. In that moment she was feeling both rhythms, the street and her blindness, unsure of which to follow and uncertain if both can be followed.

I have often been caught in the midst of conflicting rhythms wondering which to dance to. My near decade of legal blindness has taught me how to pass and for the most part I have been satisfied with its teachings. It is only now, on the eve of my full decade that I have begun to wonder — why am I explicitly passing? Why do I harmonize? At the very least I should embrace a contrapuntal relation and yet, I do not. I am haunted by my polyrhythmic blindness. And yet, I pass. But, do I pass? Sometimes. But, as what? As sighted? Sometimes. But always as in the
world; I pass as though I am in the world of sight and that this is real. What I see is mere distortion. I pass and show that I know this.

Passing thus produces the false image of belonging. It imitates the harmony between us and the street and thus the rhythm of life. When I pass I project this image of belonging rather than its imitation. In this sense, passing is political. Belonging in that to belong we must belong somewhere at some time, is itself political. When I pass, I take on the image and meaning of what belonging is and where I belong, namely, in the collective of sight. This is what makes passing a political act. I wonder if when I pass and conceal my blindness I am politically erasing it by saying it does not belong in the sighted collective? It is in this sense, that the “effects” produced through performance of which Butler speaks, are also political. “Performative” suggests that identities such as gender and I suggest such as blindness and sight are political acts. Such effects exist within the rhythm of the street. This rhythm is felt by blind people and visible to those who see. Tanya Titchkosky (2003) suggests that the importance placed on the look “points to the role that ‘visibility’ plays in constructing our cultural understandings of disability” (p. 16). When I pass, what do I do with the “look” of which Titchkosky speaks? Do I make it invisible? If I do not pass, do I produce the look of blindness, of disability? And, does this “look” belong in the street without the look of stigma?

Recall the jazz music of the “Second Line Parade” that accompanied Erin across the street. This movement, or accompaniment, may be understood as seeking an intimacy, possibly one other than stigma. Let me return to de Certeau as a way to engage this possibility. de Certeau

---

17 For an excellent discussion on passing including as political, see the collection of essays by Jeff Brune and Daniel Wilson (2013).
discusses the movement of people in the street, people who de Certeau calls practitioners. According to de Certeau, practitioners,

make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a busting city were characterized by their blindness (de Certeau, 1988, p. 158).

Sighted people are the “practitioners” of the street. They are the rhythm of the street “mak[ing] use of spaces that cannot be seen,” spaces they cannot see. They make use of such spaces as the street not only to make manifest the rhythm but also to compose it. They simultaneously create and are creations of the rhythm. Their intimacy is with the creation — the rhythm — and not with the act of creating the rhythm. Their knowledge of themselves as creator or composer “eludes legibility,” their audibility. They pass in the streets as sighted without even knowing that they are composing the poetics of movement. Sighted people do not see (hear) that they are the composers of the rhythm of the street. It is as if their act of composing is, “as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms.” This is to say that sighted people, the practitioners of the street, are so immersed within the “organizat[ion] of a bustling city” that they cannot see that they are organizing the bustle of the city. Like lovers in each other’s arms they are intimately entwined blind to the intimacy as something they have and are creating. Sighted people feel the rhythm and this is their intimacy with the street. They do not see it or hear it. They simply are in each other’s arms — they are intimate. The practitioners of the street are simply in the street — they have an intimacy. The intimacy of performing sight eludes them; it is as if they are blind lovers in each other’s arms.
Blind people not only feel the rhythm of the street, they also “see” it. We can “see” in that we can read these “unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others.” When sighted people perform sight, when they move in the street blind to their creating of the “bustling city” the performative is written on the street as “poems unrecognizable” to them and thus “illegible.” Blind people can see, feel and read “each body’s” performative, each poem of movement “signed,” authored or composed by the sighted practitioners of the street. We see these blind lovers in each other’s arms and we feel the intimacy of rhythm in the street. Ironically, our intimacy with the street is not blind but polyrhythmic and this rhythm is with the practitioners themselves, with their intimacy with blindness, the street, its rhythms and with their own rhythmic intimacy. In order to pass in the street as sighted, whether blind or sighted, we must engage in this polyrhythmic intimacy. This intimacy is embodied in the poetics of movement of which I spoke earlier, a poetics upon which the poetics of the eye relies for the legibility of its poems.

Blind people are imitate with the intimacy of blindness shared between sighted people and the street. Our passing traces the “paths” that “intertwine” to create the “unrecognized poem” of the street. It is this tracing that allows us to be at one with the street. Blind people imitate this intimacy by passing as sighted. When we pass we reproduce the sighted person’s blind intimacy with the street, projecting the image that we too are composers without even knowing it. We appear as if we belong; we sound as if we are harmonizing; it is as if we are the rhythm. For blindness to not merely appear, sound, or imitate belonging, but to actually belong in the street without passing or without stigma, there needs to be an intimacy between blindness and sight. The remaining two acts of this work are dedicated to engaging the meaning of this intimacy both implicitly and explicitly.
ACT IV

AT HOME BY MYSELF WITH YOU

SCENE I

SD: Lights slowly fade up revealing the interior of a studio apartment. The sound of rain comes from an open window stage left. The room is softly lit by a string of Christmas lights that hang from a rod that is fastened to the ceiling running the length of the wall. Under the lights there is a grey couch with two pink velvet pillows resting at each end. There is a large grey and black square coffee table with a glass top that sits in front of the couch. The room radiates a cosy beauty, warm and inviting, friendly.

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model suggests that there are two distinct regions in which the performer in and of everyday life moves. “The term ‘front region’ […] refer[s]” says Goffman, “to the place where the performance is given” (1959, p. 107) while the, back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted […] [h]ere the performer can relax; he [sic] can drop his [sic] front, forgo speaking his [sic] lines, and step out of character (1959, p. 112).

Everyday life is made up of a series of performances. The “front region” or stage is typically understood as a space where the performer cannot “relax” but is instead constantly “on,”

---

engaged within a performance or “in character” aware that they may be observed by anyone at any time. This heightened state of being “on” or “in character” at all times is, for the most part, taken-for-granted. But, being “in character” for a blind person is an on-going explicit activity, particularly in the “front region.” A blind person in the front region can and must feel the rhythm of the street, the rhythm of the performance of sight and in this way participates in it. This participation or performance may be a set of choreographed movements and phrases that accompany passing or, it may be an improvisational performance. Recall how, in Act II, Erin turned her face toward the sounds of her classmate’s voices during the “get-to-know-you game.” This sort of performance follows the improvisational type where the blind person responds to a prompt; someone laughs, look toward the laugh.

In contrast to the interactional work done in the front region, where people are “on” and “in character,” the “back region” is a place for relaxation as Goffman says. After all, there is no audience backstage. “… the back region” Goffman tells us, “will be the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude” (1959, p. 113). In some sense, Goffman is right; audiences rarely, if ever, enter the back region of any performance. But, this unwritten rule may not hold for blind people.

For a blind person the separation between performer and audience member is not always clear. The front region is made up of characters that engage in the blind person’s performance while simultaneously observing it. In addition to these sighted characters/audience members there are also some other characters, namely, the character “blind” and the character “sight.”
These “stock characters”¹⁹ haunt blind people, it is as if they follow us everywhere we go. Who they are, how we have come to know them, the ways in which the two act both separately and together are always with us (blind people). “Blind” and “sight” may be understood as stock characters; their characteristics are comprised of a myriad of cultural conceptions of what it is to be blind and what it is to see. They are characters that are reluctant to stay in the front region. Since these characters are conceptual they are also, in this sense, ephemeral and thus they move, ghost-like, without any restrictions to the back region regardless of any rules written or unwritten.

Goffman tells us that when we are in the back region, be it our home or any other place we may find solace, we are “off,” no longer in performance mode but free from any audience “intrusions.” This is not so for blind people. We are always, in some sense, “on.” With blindness it is unclear as to where the back region, back stage or a place where we are not “on” is. The difficulty of the dramaturgical model as Goffman understands it, where there is a front and back region, does not fully hold for blind people; for blindness, they are not distinct. To use common vernacular, the separation between front and back is “blurry” or not distinctive. It is difficult to know where I am not “on” and so I am always “on.” The stock characters of “blind” and “sight”

¹⁹ According to The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (Baldick, 2008) stock characters are defined as “stereotyped character[s] easily recognized by readers or audiences from recurrent appearances in literary or folk tradition, usually within a specific genre such as comedy or fairy tale. Common examples include the absent-minded professor, the country bumpkin, the damsel in distress […] the villain of melodrama, the wicked stepmother, the jealous husband” and the like. I place the characters blind and sight in this category.
seem to act as contagonists. The distinct duality of their constant presence haunts me, they both tempt me to be who and what they are and so I am neither. I am not sight but neither am I blind since I have yet to imagine what being blind is in terms of a self, of me. How do I do blind? As Michalko (2002b) says, blind “was what I was […] not who I was” (p. 117). The limitations of Goffman’s dramaturgical model has presented an opportunity for me to get back to the drama and thus where life remains a stage with no distinct back region to retreat into. Any opportunity for rethinking our positions and participation in everyday life falls between the actor in everyday life (in this case, Erin) and the theorist in the act of bracketing everyday life (in this case, me). In a sense, Erin represents me and I her throughout this work. (See prologue).

SCENE II

SD: Lights fade up revealing the interior of the studio apartment from the previous scene. Erin is seated comfortably with her legs stretched out along the grey couch. She has one pink velvet pillow tucked behind her back while she loosely hugs the other. Her head is tilted upstage, away from the audience, looking out the open window to her left. She appears as if she is someplace else, as if she is lost in her thoughts listening to the rain.

---

20 Contagonist is a concept unique to, Dramatica: A New Theory of Story (Phillips & Huntley, 2001). Dramatica is a trademark of Write Brothers Inc. (formally Screenplay Systems), a “world leader in film and television screenwriting and production software” (Write Brothers Inc., 2018). Phillips & Huntley (2001) define contagonist as the character who represents, “Temptation […] [t]his character works to place obstacles in the path of the Protagonist, and to lure it away from success. Because this character works to hinder the progress of the Protagonist, we coined the name Contagonist” (p. 31). In this sense, I understand the characters of blind and sight to act as contagonists.

21 Michalko (2002a) speaks of a similar way of being and calls it “estranged familiarity.”
Breaking from her thoughts, she turns her head slowly to the right and pauses to look at a bouquet of sunflowers in a clear glass vase resting on the coffee table. Her look turns into a stare. She closes her right eye and continues staring. She then moves her left eyeball around with the flowers as her centre point appearing as though she is testing her eyesight, more specifically, her visual field. Suddenly, her right eyelid springs open as she closes her left eyelid. She repeats the same movement. Closing both eyes she takes a deep guttural breath.

Erin stands up and walks toward a mirror mounted on the wall stage right. She comes as close to the mirror as possible, touching her nose to the glass. She stands blinking, looking at her reflection. Her breathing is deep and her movements are precise. She appears as if she is calm yet focused. Several moments pass as she looks at her reflection. She slowly begins to walk backwards away from the mirror while focusing on her reflection. She stops, not far from the mirror. Her eyes turn to the floor. Her head follows. She takes a deep breath and raises her head. She looks around the room. As she does so, her face takes on the appearance of subtle frustration. She does not know where to rest her eyes, every place, every object in the room seems to demand testing — to test her eyes, to see if she can see. Bringing her fingers up to her forehead she gently pushes, squeezing her eyelids shut.

Erin opens her eyes and abruptly walks across the stage to a pink rod iron table with a glass top, stage right. There is an emerald green satin makeup case resting on the table. She slides the case across the glass toward her, unzips it and begins removing its contents. Meticulously she arranges each tool on the table, eyeliner, eyeshadow, eye makeup brushes, mascara and places them neatly on the glass ready for her use. She takes a deep breath satisfied with her arrangement. She places the case on the pink rod iron chair next to the table. Noticing that the emerald green of the case complements the pink flower and green leaf on the seat cushion of the
chair, she smiles. Looking at the table upon which the makeup tools rest, she takes a deep breath and turns her gaze to the mirror and then to the makeup tools.

Turning her back to the mirror, she slowly reaches for the eyeshadow and brush. She opens the eyeshadow case holding it in her left hand and swirls the end of the brush into the shadow powder with the right. She brings the end of the brush up to her mouth, lightly blows the excess powder from its bristles, closes her right eye and gently runs the brush over her eyelid. Her movements are both gentle and precise, her breathing is slow, almost serine as she begins to dress her eyes. Completing both eyes, she puts down the shadow and brush. Her right hand hovers over a few eyeliners as she decides what colour to pick. Her hand lands on “midnight black.” She removes the cap, closes both eyes and with the left hand she slightly pulls her right eyelid making it into a straight line. With the right hand she runs the liner along the ridge of her eyelid just a hair above her lashes. She then opens her eyes wide and runs the liner along her bottom lash line. There is an ease and a confidence to her movements, she appears to know exactly what she is doing and how without any hesitation. After completing the other eye she lifts the mascara tube from the glass table. She stands, with a focused stillness, a military like precision as she brings the mascara wand up to her face. Her eyelids relax; her lips part slightly; she begins to move the brush very slowly in an upward motion through her lashes. Once she is satisfied with the mascara on the one eye, she blinks several times, dips the wand back in the tube for more ink and repeats this motion on the other eye.

Fluttering her lashes, drying them, she packs up her makeup and zips the case shut. She turns slowly and looks toward the mirror then quickly returns to the couch. With an audible exhale she flops down onto the couch and looks around the room.
Her eyes land, once again, on the sunflowers in front of her. Her stare is aggressive, almost militant, as if she is fighting the urge to close one eye to see, if now, maybe just maybe she can...

Suddenly, she springs up from the couch, grabs her coat and umbrella, slips her feet into red patent rain boots and exists stage right. The sound of rain grows louder as the lights fade to black.

This back region, Erin’s back stage, was not as relaxing as that of Goffman’s. She is still “on” and is still in character. It is necessary now to outline both the character that Erin is playing and the audience to which she is playing.

Ironically, both the character and the audience reside in the experience and orientation of Erin — she symbolizes both character and audience. Moreover, both the character and audience can be socially located in blindness and sight and both are interchangeable; at one time, blindness is the character and sight the audience and, at another, sight is the character and blindness the audience. This dynamic and dialectic is exemplified in Erin being “at home alone.”

She is alone and yet the presence of the characters “blind” and “sight” crowd her studio apartment. She cannot merely sit with or “look” at a vase of sunflowers, how can she when their bright yellow petals and dark centre mimic that of her eyes? The yellow, almost gold, flecks that surround her pupil are drawn to the sunflowers. It is as if the yellowish gold petals are beckoning her to not just look at but to see if she can see them; see their detail; see her eyes seeing; see not seeing their detail; see her blindness. Erin cannot just sit in her apartment with sunflowers. She must decide who she is in relation to them. Is she a sighted person sitting, looking at flowers or is she a blind person sitting, looking at flowers? It is almost as if, like character and audience, “blind” and “sight,” too are interchangeable. This interchangeability is what demands a decision.
The decision, deciding who she is in relation to the vase of flowers commands her to test herself, her eyes, and determine who she is by how her eyes behave. And so, she sits, testing each eye attempting to gage the degree of “blind” and “sight,” deciding to which character she not only belongs but also which character she may perform.

Erin is in her apartment alone, her back region, her back stage, her home, surrounded by objects and colours that both match and complement each other. Surrounded by the pink and green of her oil spot, the yellowish gold of her flower eyes and by the haunting presence of the mirror and all that it sees, she is at home by herself, a self that is neither blind nor sight, a self that is caught between two characters unrecognizable even to herself when she looks in the mirror.

The mirror that is mounted on the wall becomes a watchful eye. Yet, as a mirror, it is useless to her. It does not reflect who she is. Erin may see the reflection of herself when her nose is pressed to the glass, her breath fogging up her image but when she steps away, when she moves into the realm of distance, her mirror image disappears. And yet, reflection remains.

SCENE III

*SD: The rain from the previous two scenes has stopped but deep gray heavy clouds remain. The dips and cracks of Bloor Street’s shifting sidewalk are filled with an opaque water creating deep puddles. Erin’s red patent rain boots move through these puddles without hesitation, her steps creating mini explosions of water splashing up from the pavement into the air. The quickness of her steps testify to her familiarity with and comfort on this street. As she moves up Bloor Street toward her university, Erin appears frustrated, annoyed and yet, pensive. Thoughts of the watchful eye, of the mirror, pursue her compelling her to pick up her pace in an attempt to evade*
its watchful gaze, now a stare. The brightness of the sunflowers burn in her memory and accompany her as she moves down Bloor Street. Her pace picks up once again in an attempt, this time, to evade both images.

A tense almost statuesque-like quality to her movements accompanies her as she walks down Bloor Street. With each step it is as if every muscle in her body is contracting, coming together, fusing into a stone sculpture. Realizing that she has been holding her breath in an attempt to move faster, she stops abruptly. She inhales deeply, feeling every muscle expand in relief.

Looking to her left she sees her university building across the street. Its deep grey/brown cement structure looms overhead with its barren flower boxes and ominous glass windows that reflect the image of the street concealing the interior action of the building. She turns to her right; Varsity Stadium, a vast open football field with a track that runs outside its perimeter presents itself to her as if proclaiming “here I am; look at me!” A tall, large, white scoreboard stands facing the street; it reads, Home: 0, Visitor: 0. Moments pass as she stands attentive to her breathing, staring at the scoreboard; the busyness of the street swirling around her. The sound of a car zooming through a puddle interrupts her stare. Realizing that she is standing in the middle of the sidewalk, Erin moves to her right, in front of the stadium and sits on a large grey cement rectangle, the university’s version of a bench.

Erin sits with her feet hovering just above the ground. The annoyed frustration she felt when she left her studio apartment is returning. She begins moving her feet, the heals of her boots hitting the cement bench telling of her unsettled mood. Her eyes scan the area; they find buildings, people, cars, squirrels, potted trees attempting to grown in a world of cement. Erin squints her eyes. Her muscles begin to contract, her face muscles scrunch, her breathing becomes shallow, her eyes are moving rapidly as she searches for a place to look, to rest her eyes. She feels the
urge to test herself once again to see if maybe now, maybe here something will be different? Her palms push against the damp cement of the bench as she leans forward straightening her back when her eyes land on a mailbox directly in front of her. She stares. Her posture tells of an inner battle, she is fighting the urge to close one eye, to see if she can... Erin’s gaze suddenly drops from the mailbox to her boots followed by her head. Moments pass as she sits, head bowed. Slowly she raises her gaze, pausing on the mailbox before quickly turning to her bag as she removes her cell phone. Erin’s eyes appear to bounce from her phone to the street and back again. She raises the device to her face, moving her right pointer finger on the screen and brings the phone to her right ear.

“Hi.”

SD: Erin’s voice is a bit higher than usual.

“Hey Air, how are you?”

“Oh, I’m, I’m fine.”

SD: Erin’s voice is now soft and polite. There is a moment of silence on the phone.

“Oh, are you sure? Is everything okay?”

SD: The voice on the other end of the phone does not sound anxious or worried but rather calm and soothing, sounding as if they were almost expecting the call.

“Um, no. I feel, I just feel, I don’t know. (SD: Pause). I just feel so tired. I am just so tired of trying to be, you know? Like I know I’m blind and that’s all fine but then I start wondering like how blind am I? And then I start testing myself, like I’m testing myself
all the time now. Wondering if my vision has changed from yesterday or even this morning. And, I know I shouldn’t. I mean, I know it really doesn’t matter, like what am I going to do about it? But I do it anyway. And then I go to school and I have to work so hard, like to even just be there. I walk down the hall and I can’t see anyone’s face so I never know who is coming at me so I just smile, like all the time at everyone and there is just, silence. I’ve introduced myself to the same people like ten times, I’m sure some of them think I’m like an awful person or that I think that everyone looks the same or something.”

*SD: Erin exhales looking at the world around her.*

“I don’t think they think that.”

*SD: Erin’s voice has a quiet boom to it.*

“Well, they must think something because I keep reminding people about my eyes and they never say anything to me so they must think that I’m lying or something. And, and then even the people I know don’t say anything! Sometimes I walk by them and then they tell me — "Oh, yeah I saw you earlier” — and they didn’t say anything! I’m just getting so tired of this, of always trying to be… I don’t know.

*SD: Silence.*

“I know…”

*SD: Erin’s breathing is shallow.*
“And, and I feel like I’m losing my sympathy for other people. Like when I hear people complaining about getting readings done or deadlines and I’m like, really? Really? Try doing all this blind and then come talk to me! And I know that’s wrong. I don’t want, (SD: Erin’s voice begins to crack) I don’t want to be like that…”

“Oh, Erin, you’re not, you’re not like that. You are allowed to feel this way.”

SD: Tears replace the earlier rain in Erin’s eyes, she looks tense and nervous. A few other people have sat on the cement benches around her and are now in earshot of her conversation. She switches ears holding the phone in her left hand, grabs her bag and umbrella with the right and stands.

“Sorry, can I call you right back? It’s just, I’m outside and I really don’t want anyone… You know?”

“For sure, where are you?”

“Just across the street from school, I’ll call you right back.”

SD: Erin hangs up the phone and begins walking past her favourite coffee shop toward the crosswalk at the corner of St. George and Bloor Street. She stands waiting with a crowd of people to cross. As she does, the Toronto Funk Band (the chorus), comprised of several street musicians, are heard warming up their instruments as they set up on the corner. The light changes and Erin disappears into the crowd.
SCENE IV

SD: There is a sound of keys unlocking a door as the lights slowly fade up on a small dimly lit windowless office. Erin enters the office, closes the door behind her and sits on a rolling chair behind a dark wooden desk. She drops her bag and umbrella on the floor beside her, taps the screen of her phone and brings it to her right ear.

“Hi, sorry, I’m in my office now.”

“Hey, oh okay, good. Air, I know how you’re feeling, it’s tough sometimes.”

“Yeah. I just, I just, I honestly don’t know how to feel. I mean every minute of every day I’m just thinking about my vision and then about my blindness and honestly, (SD: More tears break free from Erin’s eyes and caress her cheeks) I feel like I have no idea how to be either and so I’m just here, going through the motions of my day and to be honest I’m scared. Not like horror movie scared, I don’t want you to think I’m like constantly afraid.”

SD: They both let out a small laugh.

“But I’m scared. (SD: Erin no longer has control over her tears, she breaks down). I’m scared of, of what might come. I don’t know what to do, I don’t know how to be blind or if I can be blind and I just, I always feel guilty, like I’m never fully being blind or sighted even though I don’t know what it even means to be fully anything. And, I feel so bad saying all of this to you but I’m not like you. I mean you’re cool, you have the whole
blind look, it suits you. But I, I mean I don’t know. And, like yesterday, (SD: Erin’s speech quickens as she talks through her tears) when we were all out for drinks and I was asked when I was going to start using “the cane” and all I could say was — “I don’t know” — as if it were so simple, you know? There is just so much pressure to be and I can’t see but I know I can see a little bit so, so what does that make me? And, I’m tired and I’m scared and just alone. I’m just alone. I mean, I know I’m not alone, I have many people around me but it’s different. No one sees what I see, no one knows how hard I’m working to see. Most of the time no one even remembers I’m blind! Like, they tell me, they tell me they forget as if that is what, like a complement? Then I start wondering, should I pretend to be more blind? But then I feel guilty again because, like you know, because there is an element of choice. But I can’t see and that follows me everywhere. And… and… there is just so much…”

SD: Moments of silence flood the phone. Erin’s face is dripping wet, her cheeks are red and her breathing is fast.

“I know, Erin. I wish I could tell you this gets easier but… this is something that you will be wondering your whole life.”

SD: Curtain.
THEORETICAL INTERMISSION

In this Act, Erin is alone, in her studio apartment, and she is there by herself. She is alone there with you. While being alone by herself in her apartment is relatively easy to comprehend, being with “you” at the same time, is not so easy to understand. This is not to suggest that the answer to who “you” is can be located in Erin since the answer is not clear to her, or to anyone, particularly when they are alone.

What makes things more interesting as well as complex is that Erin’s “you” is pluralistic in character. Like everyone else, Erin, while by herself, is never alone in the conventional sense of that concept. We always have company in our aloneness. We, for example, are accompanied by our thoughts, worries, fears, joys, anxieties and some of us are even accompanied by our blindness and sight. This is Erin’s “you.” This forms the social complexity and pluralism of Erin by herself with you.

Let me illustrate this complexity by making use of the Canadian film from which I take the title of this Act — *At Home By Myself... With You* (2009). Directed by Kris Booth, this film features a woman named Romy, a travel agent who has not left her apartment in six years. Romy’s agoraphobia together with many other fears and phobias has made her apartment the central hub of her existence. Food, clothing, work and even friendships are delivered to Romy’s door by a cast of characters making being at home by herself a crowded place to be. Romy may live by herself in her apartment, yet she is never alone. This film may be read as an allegory for the “you” we all live with. In Romy’s case, her “you” is comprised of dramatic/traumatic life events that manifested into phobias and fears making venturing outside unbearable.
The “you” with whom Erin is at home by herself is blindness and sight. Unlike Romy, Erin does venture out. Not only does she go out, those she is alone with, go with her. She does not have to rid herself of either blindness or sight in order to travel and venture out. In contrast, agoraphobia, typically understood as a “mental health issue” must be gotten rid of or, at least dealt with, in order to venture out. It is almost impossible for Romy to take agoraphobia with her. Erin, in contrast, takes blind and sight with her no matter where she goes. Indeed, blind and sight resist being gotten rid of and they are both “at home” with Erin and “go with her” no matter where she goes, including out.

This presents a particular kind of quagmire for Erin and, I suggest, for all blind people. Given blind and sight accompany Erin everywhere, she must prepare them for any venture, no matter where. In a very prosaic way, we might call this preparation, “dressing up.” Erin dresses up her blindness and sight before venturing out.

In Scene II, Erin does her makeup. The application of eyeshadow, eyeliner and mascara is one way of understanding how she dresses up her blindness. What is interesting is that Erin dresses up her blindness by applying makeup to her eyes insofar as her blindness does live in her eyes. She does not dress up her whole face with foundation, blush or even lipstick but rather focuses strictly on her eyes. The conventional understanding of the eyes is that they see and eyesight reveals itself as the essence of the eye. When we think of sight or when we get it checked for example, the site of such activities is the eyes. Eyes have come to be known as the dwelling of sight.

There are, of course, many ways that blind people might prepare or dress up. Making up the eyes is only one.
But, Erin dresses up her blindness by dressing up her eyes. If Brian Magee and Martin Milligan (1995) are right and sighted people do indeed “live in their eyes” (p.45) and if Michalko (2002b) too is correct in saying that, “their identities are in their eyes; their world comes into their eyes; they live in their eyes” (p.83) then where do blind people live and where is their identity? When blindness is understood as missing sight, the life of blindness is to be found in eyes that do not work. What is interesting is that Erin, in dressing up her eyes, hints at the understanding that blindness too lives in the eyes, that her identity and that of blindness is, like sighted people, to be found in the eyes. This means, however, that for life to exist in the eyes without sight, something more must be made of blindness than sheer missing-sight. Dressing up eyes that do not work, after all, would be vain at best and futile at worst. Erin’s dressing up of her eyes, which is the simultaneous dressing up of blindness and sight, is her attempt to orient to eyes as the home of both blindness and sight. Perhaps, blindness is moving in; perhaps the “you” sight lives with is blindness.

In her work on the relation between feminism and science and in her discussion of feminist objectivity and the “persistence of vision,” Donna Haraway (1998) writes, “This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation (p. 581). Treating, for my purposes, “this gaze” as sight, we can begin to understand how it is sight that “inscribes” and “marks” the bodies opposite to itself as blindness. Sight “mythically inscribes” not only the mark of blindness but its own claim to the power of seeing and thus the power to represent without being represented. This is one of the ways, perhaps the key one, that sight understands itself as persisting and, doing so, in an unmarked way. In contrast, Erin’s “gaze” inscribes a power to
both blindness and sight and wrestles with the possibility that each “sees, represents and marks” the other.

Erin’s sight is at home by itself with blindness. When Erin makes the decision to dress her eyes before venturing out, she turns her back to the mirror thus focusing on her blindness, a decision that foregrounds her blindness leaving sight in the shadows (Michalko, 1998). Both blindness and sight venture out with Erin; her oil spot, her colours and her sight, including her memory of it, move into the world together. Ironically, her eyes — all dressed up — venture out into a world which already boasts of the presence of one in the shadow of the other. The irony is that in dressing up her eyes, Erin relies on sight, sighted people, to see them. Equally ironic, Erin turns her back on sight and focuses her dressed up eyes on the concept that they are the home to both blindness and sight.

Thus, when Erin dresses up her eyes she is dressing both blindness and sight. The quagmire persists. When Erin ventures out into the world with her dressed up eyes she is no longer at home by herself. She is out in the world with “you;” a world that is made up of sight, a world that Erin describes as “silent.” Seeing and sight are silent. There is no sound associated with sight, no oral telltale indication that someone is in the process of seeing. It is silent. Recall when Erin spoke of walking down the halls of her university smiling and experiencing silence in return. Perhaps those she passed saw her smile, perhaps they smiled back or, perhaps they did not; either way they used their eyes as a mode of communication that did not register with Erin. Smiling is, after all, silent. Erin heard no smile.

The question of how to be blind, sighted or both is prevalent in this act. Erin is at home by herself with you, she is on the street in her red patent rain boots, smiling in the halls of her
university and crying in her windowless office all while wondering if “it” is getting worse. “It” is Erin’s blindness. “It” is somehow becoming Erin herself and she is wondering, sometimes through tears, how to be *it*.

What is the affect of this wondering in a world known as sighted? Erin is both blind and sighted, she can both see and not see, a duality of perspectives that contradict the very being of not only Erin but of anyone. The question becomes how to be it and its opposite. She is both and yet, the two are understood to be opposites. She is by herself in her experience of what and how she sees and yet, she is accompanied by the presence of both blind and sight. Erin feels guilty in that she can see and alone in that she cannot see. She is mixed, both, a combination of the two that is not static but very much alive in the absence and presence of her sight. The question remains how to be? Be blind? Be sight? Is it an either or question, or is there a possibility of being both? Is there such a thing as living both blind and sight at the same time? If someone is totally blind does this mean that they are only blind? Does this mean that by definition they are truly opposite and devoid of sight? If someone is totally sighted does this mean that they are only sighted? Does this mean that they live as the opposite of blindness and see everything? How then is Erin to *be* at home by herself or anywhere for that matter?

Being at home with one’s self is more complex than the idea of a unified self suggests. A more psychological reading of the self would suggest that somewhere in the interiority of a person lies buried a unified and authentic self. This perspective, however, limits the self to a unidimensional character devoid of all other perspectives. We are, for example, either blind or sighted; we are not and indeed cannot be both/or/and; we can be only “Or.” It is this perspective as well that becomes part of the social process that produces the self as a problem. If we are
either/or and not both/and, then one of these selves must be a problem from the perspective of the existence of a unified authentic self. In this sense, we are all problems.

The dominance of sight, particularly in Western culture, suggests that while Erin lives with both blindness and sight and while both live in her eyes, sight dominates. It is the main resident, perhaps even the landlord. Becoming or being blind, therefore, is not a teleological phenomenon. It is not a telos, an end, but rather a contentious movement of being. Blindness is a way of being in the world and is a perception of the world that is influx. It has a way of revealing itself in different ways that makes a life of blindness dynamic. This way of being however, may not be as explicitly effortless as a sighted way of being.

In Scene IV, Erin speaks of how there is an element of choice to being blind or rather being explicitly blind in and to the world. Her decision to “take up” the white cane and be blind is one that she is unsure of. Being sighted in and on the street is not something that is laboured over, there is no explicit decision when being sighted, no announcement to the world, it is treated as the resting state of being or “the norm.” Blindness, in contrast, comes with a pronouncement of being, a statement to the world that shows the being of blindness, a statement that is always-already tied up in meaning and one that leaves the blind individual open for interpretation that is silent. Blindness is seen and at times we (blind people) can feel or sense being seen but it is difficult for us to know at all times when and how we are being seen since the act of seeing is silent.

What is the blind person “taking up” when they (we) decide to take up the white identification (ID) cane? Are we silently telling the world that we are blind? If that is indeed what we are doing is that all that is done when the ID cane is taken up? When people see the ID
cane do they identify the person holding it as blind? Do people typically, sighted or otherwise, identify the white cane as an “identification” of blindness or is there perhaps more going on? If something more, what might that be?

Taking up a white ID cane is far different from taking up a white cane used for the expressed purpose of orientation and mobility. The latter is a longer cane, one that becomes an extension of the blind person’s hand, their touch and their contact with the world. The white ID cane, on the other side, is short and is not a good mobility device in terms of touch. It identifies the one holding it as blind.

If the mobility cane is for the purpose of “getting around” and, given its whiteness, an identification cane, what does a shorter ID cane represent? First, it represents an identity, a blind identity. The shorter ID cane may be interpreted within the frame of this act as a way of dressing up blindness. Taking up the ID cane is a way of being blind with a look. Its presence indicates that the holder is indeed blind. It is an accessory to and of blindness in the way that uniforms identify people as something. For example, the uniformed pilot of an airplane or the uniformed police officer. There are more subtle examples of uniforms such as the ‘cool’ attire of a teenager, the heavy beard and checkered shirt of a “hipster” and, of course, the three piece suit of a “suit.” Dressing up blindness with a white ID cane tells the world, “Hey, in case you didn’t know, not all people see in the way that you do so watch out, I am blind and on the move!” “On the move” may be understood as an immersion into culture, society, into everyday life where we interact with others and through that interaction influence our carving out of a social identity, in this case, a blind identity. This is akin to Charles Horton Cooley’s (1902) version of a looking glass self, a self which is reflected in the eyes of others while the other is reflected back to the self.
Second, it represents a way of inhabiting, of being in and of experiencing the world. The white ID cane represents eyes that are no longer testing to see if they can see but rather eyes that know of, and perhaps are confident in, their blindness. In the first instance, the ID cane identifies the person as blind to others while, in the second instance, the person holding it identifies her/himself as blind. These represent two different versions of identification. Moreover, the white ID cane leaves little room for doubt of the presence of blindness, or does it?

Erin’s confusion of how to be blind is complicated by the presence of her sight. She can both see and not see at the same time. Taking up the white ID cane is not as simple as one might think since her way of being and moving in the world includes sight, not a lot but sight nonetheless. This little bit of sight together with her oil spot is Erin’s blindness, a version that is unique to her.

If Erin were to take up the white ID cane she would be telling the world and herself that she identifies as blind. The complication that fuels the struggle to take up or not to take up the ID cane lies in her little bit of sight. This little bit of sight is an unexpected characteristic of blindness for sighted people and even for Erin. Erin’s telephone conversation is a hint that she may be worried about others noticing her little bit of sight. Such a worry conjures questions of what if?

What if people see me seeing?

What if they think I am lying?

What if they say something to me?
Taking up the ID cane announces an identity to the world. The holder of the cane is saying to the world that they know themselves to be blind. This declaration opens their identity, more specifically their blindness, up to interpretation, judgement and perhaps even to the terror of questioning. This would transport Erin’s blindness from her eyes to the street, making her blindness no longer just her own but in a way, everyone’s. Erin’s eyes would become part of the public domain. This would mean that Erin would have to answer questions, whether they were asked or not, questions that may have been asked all along and asked without the presence of a white ID cane. Passing as sighted without any identification of blindness means, among other things, that the one passing is in control of the interpretation of others. This, of course, may or may not be true. Others, for example, may wonder; “what’s wrong with her” they might ask. “She said nothing when I smiled at her,” they might think. Questions, then, whether they are silent, spoken aloud, asked by sighted others or by blind people, accompany blindness as it moves in a “sighted world.”

So far I have spoken of blindness within the terms of a conventional relation to sight. Everyone should see and those who do not or those who see only a little bit, should see, like everyone else. Instead, they are sightless, their sight or most of it, is missing. This makes it both easy and difficult to move in public, in everyday life. Moving with sight that is missing is easier than moving blind, or blindness is an identity not understood as missing sight. This identity requires the blind person to dress up their blindness, to make it something other than what is strictly expected and given to us by sighted culture. We are required to make a home for blindness which, in turn, requires more than identifying with it or as it. It requires “being it,” a requirement that is always-already and will continue to be confusing and necessarily problematic. It is to this problematic of making-a-home that I turn to in Act V.
ACT V

THE SPECTOR OF A HOME

SD: The theatre is lit by bright white lights exposing an audience of empty seats and a stage that is caught in-between shows. There are three hanging lights resting on the apron of the stage; cords bound together forming big circles piled on top of each other stage left; four cans of paint with long black drips that have dried on the sides huddled together stage right along with a tall open ladder looming upstage.

Erin is seated cross-legged centre stage atop a high bar-like stool. She sits quietly with her right elbow resting on her right knee with her chin propped up in hand; her left arm is open, running the length of her body; her left-hand dangling just off her left knee. She stares, not at anything in particular, but as if she is staring at everything in general. She does not appear to be bored or restless, but in a way captivated by everything in general and by nothing in particular.

A side door between the first row of the audience and the base of the stage opens. A, a young, tall and very thin man enters holding a stack of papers in his left arm and a coffee in a paper cup in his right hand. Erin turns her head slowly toward the door and glances at A, smiles and resumes her trance-like position. A seems slightly thrown by Erin’s presence. He returns her smile and walks up four rows of seating toward the centre directly in front of Erin. There is a makeshift table that runs across five seats four rows up centre. A walks into row four, turns to face the stage and places both his coffee and papers on the table. He looks at Erin, smiles and
proceeds to scan the theatre as if looking for someone, not any particular someone, but any
someone in general. After a few moments of looking with a tangential focus on Erin, he pauses,
looks directly at her and smiles again. When she does not respond, he shoots his arm high in the
air and waves.

A:  (SD: Exuberantly) Hi!

SD: Erin does not respond.

A:  (SD: Still waving) Hi, um, excuse me! Hi, um, hello?

SD: Erin lifts her head from her hand, looks around the stage and then in the direction of A’s
voice.

Erin: Hi, are, are you talking to me or is there someone else… ?

A:  (SD: With relieved excitement) Hi, yes, thank you! No. No, sorry I mean yes, yes I am, I

am talking to you and no, there is no one else.

Erin: Oh, hi!

A:  (SD: Warmly) Hello!

SD: Silence falls between the two. Erin is looking in the direction of A’s voice, waiting for him to
continue while A is looking back at Erin with a large smile on his face waiting for her to
continue.

A: Um, I don’t mean to interrupt you or anything, I mean not to be rude and just sort of
burst in but, but, um, are you, are you part of something or do you, do you need
something or…?

Erin: No, no not at all! No I’m, I’m not a part of anything actually and um, thanks for asking
but I, I think I’m good.

A: (SD: Relieved) Oh, oh okay, great, that’s great, thank you.

SD: A nods and smiles, apparently satisfied with Erin’s answer and begins organizing his stack
of paper into tiny piles on the table in front of him. Erin resumes her original posture. A few
moments go by when A suddenly looks up at Erin.

A: (SD: Inhaling loudly) So, what are you —

SD: Erin looks around the stage, again unsure if she is the one he is talking too.

A: Oh, no, hi, hello, sorry I mean you. (SD: He chuckles) Um, hi, yes, hello you, so, um
what are you doing, exactly?

Erin: Oh, don’t mind me, please do whatever you need to do. I’m just waiting.

A: Oh, that’s great, okay perfect, thank you. I, I will. (SD: He returns to his piles of paper,
pauses, and with sudden interest) What are you waiting for?

Erin: Blindness.

A: (SD: Surprised) Blindness?
Erin: Yup.

A: *(SD: Baffled )* Is that really something you can just wait for?

Erin: I don’t see why not.

A: Yeah, I mean, I suppose you’re right. *(SD: He looks down at the table and moves a piece of paper when he raises his head to continue).* It’s just, it’s just well it just seems like a funny sort of thing to wait for, ya know? I mean, I don’t think I have ever met someone who was just waiting for blindness.

Erin: Well, I’m not just waiting for it to like, show up out of the blue or anything like that.

A: Oh, okay, well that’s good.

Erin: *(SD: Laughs in agreement)* Yeah.

*SD: A takes a sip of his coffee pondering Erin’s answer.*

A: So wait, you know blindness is coming?

Erin: Well, I’m not exactly sure but I’m not exactly sure that it isn’t.

A: See, that, that to me sounds like you are just sort waiting for it to, out of the blue as you say, appear.

Erin: *(SD: In slight agreement)* Yeah, yeah I guess it kind of does. But I’m not. I mean I’m not just sort of waiting because, because, *(SD: Struggling to find the words)* I am
already blind, so waiting for it doesn’t seem so out there you know?

A: You are already blind?

Erin: *(SD: Swiftly)* Yes.

A: Then, why wait?

Erin: Well, because *(SD: Takes a deep breath)* because I can see.

A: Oh. *(SD: Takes a sip of coffee nodding and then with sudden confusion)* Wait, you can see?

*(SD: Erin nods in response. A puts down his coffee and springs into movement down the four levels of the audience towards the apron of the stage in front of Erin. He then pulls himself up onto the stage and walks over to Erin.)*

A: No, way!

Erin: *(SD: Amused by A’s exuberance she lets out a nasal chuckle nodding)* Way!

A: Wow. So like, what can you see?

Erin: Things that I can’t see.

A: Wow! I don’t even know what that means!

Erin: *(SD: With a slightly embarrassed laugh)* I don’t know. I mean, I, I can see things when I know I can’t see other things. So, I know I can see things that I can’t see, or something
like that. (SD: Her pace quickens) I don’t know, it’s complicated.

A: I can see that! (SD: He sits on the stage, arms stretched out behind him as he leans on his hands while his long legs bounce excitedly in front of him). Can you see this?

Erin: See what?

A: Well, if I told you then you would know and look for it and then you would see it! And, that wouldn’t be fair! (SD: His legs bounce a bit higher) Come on, can you see this?

SD: Erin jumps down from her stool to the floor and mimics A’s movement.

Erin: If this is what you mean, (SD: Bouncing her legs) then yes, I can see this.

A: (SD: He makes a silly face). Can you see that?

Erin: (SD: Erin takes a moment and looks at A. She scans his body for any movement). No.

A: No, way!

Erin: Way! (SD: Pause). What was that anyway?

A: Oh, I made a face. But don’t worry, you didn’t miss much, it wasn’t a nice one!

Erin: Oh.

A: (SD: Staring at Erin) What a curious way to be.

Erin: (SD:Thrown) What do you mean?
A: Well, you can see this *(SD: He bounces his legs again)* but not that? *(SD: He makes a face).*

Erin: Yeah.

A: And, you can see?

Erin: Yes.

A: But you are blind?

Erin: Yes.

A: *(SD: Slowly to ensure clarity)* But, you are waiting for blindness?

Erin: *(SD: Takes a deep breath)* Yes.

A: So, are you sure you should be waiting?

Erin: What do you mean?

A: Well, you can see.

Erin: Yes.

A: But, you are blind.

Erin: Yes.

A: Then it seems to me you need wait no more.

Erin: What do you mean?
A: You are blind?

Erin: Yes.

A: Then, why wait?!

Erin: Because I can see.

A: Hmmm…

Erin: Hmmm, what?

A: Well, what can you see?

Erin: I told you already.

A: You told me you can see things you can’t see but I’ve got to be honest, I have no idea what that means. So far I know you can see my legs when I do this, (SD: Bouncing his legs) but not when I make a face (SD: Makes a face) like that.

Erin: There really isn’t too much else to say.

A: (SD: Sits up cross-legged) I find that hard to believe!

Erin: (SD: Laughing) Oh, really! And, why is that?

A: Well, if there really wasn’t too much else to say then you wouldn’t be here waiting for something that you’ve already got.

SD: Erin’s eyes look down and her head quickly follows. The two sit in silence. A jumps up.
A: Hey, have you ever seen someone do this before?

*SD:* A does something. Erin looks on and laughs.

Erin: *(SD: Through laughter)* Yes. But you do it well!

*SD:* A spins into a seated cross-legged position. The two sit, once again, in silence.

A: Have you been waiting long?

Erin: I’m not sure.

*SD:* They continue sitting in silence.

A: *(SD: With a burst of energy)* Then why not wait for sight!

Erin: For, sight?

A: *(SD: Barely containing his excitement)* If blindness is taking too long why not wait for sight?!

Erin: For sight.

A: Yes, this *(SD: He throws his body weight back onto his hands as his lets shoot out in front of him. He then begins moving them as if they were bouncing).*

Erin: This?

A: You can see this, *(SD: He continues moving his legs)* but not that? *(SD: He makes a face).*
Erin:  Yes, I can see this (*SD: She too begins bouncing her legs*).

A:  So, why not wait for this and forget that. (*SD: He pretends to grab his face and then throws his hand toward the empty audience seating as if discarding it*).

Erin:  (*SD: Erin grabs his “face” from mid-air*) But that is coming and this is here.

A:  Do you know for sure that that is coming?

Erin:  No.

A:  So why wait?

Erin:  Well, some is here and so I have to wait for the rest to come.

A:  Oh. And, what about sight? Should you not wait on that too?

Erin:  No, it has already started to go.

A:  So?

Erin:  So, I can’t wait on something that is leaving.

A:  So, you wait for something that is coming.

Erin:  Yes.

A:  But not on something that is going?

Erin:  No.
A: Why not wait for something that is going and then you won’t have to wait anymore because it’s already here!

Erin: But going.

A: Going?

Erin: You can’t wait on something that is going because it is already happening.

A: So?

Erin: So, waiting would be silly since it is here already on its way.

A: You wait for that but not this.

Erin: Yes.

A: Since this is already leaving—

Erin: Yes.

A: You wait for that since it has already started to arrive?

Erin: Yes.

A: Oh. (SD: Pause) So, what don’t you see?

Erin: Pardon?

A: (SD: Louder) What don’t you see?

Erin: No, I heard you all right. It’s just, that’s such an odd question.
Is it really, though? I mean really. Think about it. Asking a blind person to explain exactly what they can’t see, oh yeah, there it is, I see it now. Yeah, I agree, that’s a bit odd. I guess that’s just a question you ask someone who can see, but then it’s like, what can’t you see? And really, how can I answer that? I mean, I don’t know, things I can’t see I guess — hey, that’s what you said! Wow, we are just two peas aren’t we? Fast friends, I would say! I mean, when I first saw you I was like, whoa, who is this random person sitting on a stool without a table to lean on? I mean who does that? Who just sits on a stool with nothing to lean on — so weird! And now look at us —

(SD: Irritated) If I tell you about my blindness and the things I can’t see will you be quiet?

(SD: Sheepishly) Mmmm-Hhhmmm...

Great. (SD: Long pause). It’s funny, I always thought blindness meant nothing, like, just nothing. I used to imagine it as a vast nothingness, like space or something. There was no beginning and no end just, just nothing. And, the person who was blind would just sort of float, weightless, in it. They would just sort of be in their blindness floating along, feeling their body in nothing. I would wonder, do they get tired of nothing, would their eyes ache from staring into and at nothing? (SD: Pause. Erin stares into her
Blindness, to me, meant outer space, just a big nothingness. Clearly, astronomy wasn’t my strong suit. I never thought of the stars and planets; the comets and asteroids; the black holes. I just, I never thought of them, I just imagined nothing. I knew, of course, that all these things existed in space, I mean I could look up and see the stars but when I thought of it, when I thought of space — there was nothing. You asked me what I don’t see and it’s kind of like that. I thought it would be nothing and, it’s not. Have you ever seen an oil spot, like on a driveway?

*SD: A nods his head yes. Erin looks at him silently waiting for a response. He then realizes that she cannot see his nod, his “that.”*

A: Yeah.

Erin: Have you ever looked at one? Like really *looked* into one?

A: Um, I’m not sure.

Erin: Well, they’re beautiful. Each one is different. A shimmering swirl of colours that move as if they had such purpose, as if they were doing something, creating something. Oil spots are like little galaxies, there is so much going on and yet, when we think of them sometimes we can’t even remember if we saw them. They become a thing we don’t see. They become just a spot to us. A spot that is just there, covering something, a
spot of nothing — just oil. But I’m telling you, if you look at one, like really look at one, you won’t be able to take your eyes off of it. That’s what I don’t see. I have an oil spot and, and sometimes I feel like I am floating in it, like I am in outer space floating, feeling and seeing what’s out there but I can’t quite capture it. I can’t get into it, it’s like I’m being pulled back or something. And I’ve tried to go with it, to let it take me and I’ve tried to fight it and nothing I do seems to move me. I’m always just sort of stuck between the stars and oil, you know?

A: No, not at all.

Erin: (SD: Laughs) I told you it was complicated.

A: So, you have something, like, right in front of you, like right now. Like, you can see it right now?

Erin: Yup.

SD: A sits and stares off into the space directly in front of him. He looks focused and somewhat in pain.

Erin: (SD: Amused) What are you doing?

A: Trying to find my oil spot.

Erin: (SD: Laughing) I don’t think it works like that!
A: Well, let’s wait and see.

SD: Erin looks at A and then into her blindness. They both sit in silence. A attempts to find his oil spot by fluttering his eyes, trying not to blink, opening them quickly, etc. When his attempts fail, his eyes begin to wander as he looks for Erin’s blindness.

From the wings of stage left a faint rhythmic sound begins and grows louder. A jazz-like snap, slide, snap, slide, snap, slide. A’s eyeballs dart around the stage as he searches for the source of the sound. Snap, slide, snap, slide, snap, slide. Do, do, da-do-do, eeee-pa, do, do, da-do-do, eeee-pa is scatted over the snap slide rhythm. A bejewelled sparkling cane emerges from the wings stage left followed by its holder, B, a tall, glamorous woman in bright colours. Her cane is the source of the snap slide rhythm as she walks, scatting overtop its sound.

A: Oh! Look! (SD: He jumps up pointing). There! There is your blindness!

Erin: (SD: Erin is jolted from her oil spot, looking around) What?

A: There, that, that is your blindness!

SD: A runs over to B, just as he is about to touch her she snaps her cane hitting him in the shin. A hops on one foot rubbing his shin.

A: OUCH!

B: Excuse me. (SD: B stands in a majestic pose).

Erin: (SD: Feverishly) Oh, no, no sorry we didn’t mean that.
A: But, (SD: He looks at Erin with confusion and slight pain hopping on one foot) that is what you are waiting for, isn’t it?

Erin: Well, sort of but that is not mine.

A: Not yours?

B: (SD: Changes her pose) I happen to belong to no one in case anyone is wondering.

Erin: Of course you don’t! I’m sorry, we didn’t mean that.

A: But that is what you said.

B: Excuse me?

A: That is what you said.

Erin: What?

A: You can see this? (SD: He shakes his leg).

Erin: Yes.

A: (SD: He makes face) But not that?

Erin: No.

A: So, that is what you’ve been waiting for! (SD: He walks toward B).

B: (SD: Stops A by raising the tip of her cane to his chest holding him at bay). Has someone been waiting for me?
A: Yes, her! *(SD: He steps back rubbing his chest).*

B: *(SD: Apologetically)* Oh, I didn’t realize I was late.

Erin: No, you’re not.

A: But, she has been waiting on you.

B: On me?

Erin: No, no, really, I wasn’t.

A: But, you said you were waiting.

Erin: I am.

A: For *that*.

Erin: I did.

A: So, what’s *that*? *(SD: He gesture toward B absent mindedly touching her on the bicep).*

B: *(SD: Removing his hand with a subtle yet effective wrist lock and moving him away)* I don’t fancy being called a “that.”

A: *(SD: Agreeing with B, still being held) That* seems sensible.

_SD: B lets A go._

B: There you go again!
A: What?

B: You did it again.

A: Did what?

Erin: That.

A: That, what?

Erin: That is not very nice.

A: That is not nice?

Erin: No.

A: But, how do you know? Excuse me?

B: Yes.

A: Why are you not nice?

B: Excuse me?

A: Not nice, why are you not nice?

B: Not nice? First, you call me late and now this?

A: No, that.

B: There you go again!

A: (SD: Shaking his head he moves toward Erin) I’m not following.
Erin: *(SD: Attempting to calm the situation)* No, it’s not nice to call someone *that*.

A: *That?*

Erin: Yes.

A: But, you said you couldn’t see *that* *(SD: He gestures out)*.

Erin: Yes.

A: And, you said that you were waiting.

Erin: Yes.

A: For *that*.

Erin: Yes.

A: That is what you said, you said that you were waiting for *that*.

Erin: Yes, but —

A: But that is what you said, so perhaps you are not nice.

Erin: Me?! 

A: *(SD: Skeptically)* I’m not saying yes, and, I’m not saying no. Think about it. *(SD: He turns dramatically to face B)*. Can you see this? *(SD: He waves at B)*.

*SD: Silence. B changes position and sighs, she is unimpressed.*
B: If, it is I you are questioning by doing some foolish gesture, then no, thankfully I cannot see, this.

*SD: Erin chuckles while A is unaffected by B’s response.*

A: *(SD: He does the worm across the stage toward B and then jumps up. His breath is laboured)*. Did you see, *that*?

B: *(SD: Touching her hair with her left hand to ensure its neatness)* From the sound of, what I assume was some sort of physical outburst, you have upped the ante causing you to pant like my puppy after a three mile run but, no, for your pains I regret to inform you that indeed I did not see your *that*.

A: *(SD: Mesmerized with B)* Curious.

B: *(SD: Turns her head sharply to face A)* Excuse me?

A: Well, you can’t see this or that and she *(SD: He points at Erin and then quickly realizes that he is the only one that gesture means anything too)* well, she can see this but not that so, so you must be currently blind…?

B: *(SD: Intrigued)* Currently?

A: You are not waiting for blindness?

B: No.
A: And your sight, is it on its way?

B: On its way?

A: Is it coming or going?

B: Coming or going?

A: Yes.

B: Neither.

A: So, you are currently blind.

B: *(SD: With one loud HA)* I suppose I am.

A: *(SD: With deep satisfaction)* See, that is what she is waiting on.

B: To be blind?

A: Yes, *that!*

B: Oh. Oh, I see now. So, you are waiting for blindness.

Erin: *(SD: Bashfully)* Yes.

B: Have you been waiting long?

Erin: I’m not sure.

A: *(SD: Jumping with joy)* And, here you are!

B: Yes, here I am but I am not what she is waiting for.
Erin: *(SD: Softly)* No, I, I know.

A: *(SD: Confused)* But you are blind.

B: *(SD: With humility)* Yes, but I am not blindness.

Erin: *(SD: Almost to herself)* That would be too convenient.

A: I’m not following.

B: I am not what she is waiting for.

A: You’re not?

B: No. I am blind.

A: And, that is what she is waiting for.

B: She is waiting for blindness and you cannot wait for something that is already here.

A: *That (SD: He gestures to B and then quickly moves to avoid her cane) sounds sensible. (SD: Pause). Hey can, can I see that?*

B: And by *that* you mean… *(SD: She holds up her bejewelled sparkling cane and tosses it from one hand into the other).*

*SD: Both Erin and A are captivated by B.*

A: *(SD: Transfixed)* Yes, that.

B: My cane?
A:  Yes, that.

B:  Hmmm...

A:  *(SD: Almost begging)* Hmmm?

B:  *(SD: As if making a snap decision)* Sure, I can take some time and wait with you. *(SD: She turns toward Erin)*. Do you mind?

Erin:  *(SD: With a mixture of awe and disbelief)* Who, me?

B:  *(SD: Gracefully)* Yes, do you mind? *(SD: Her long arm draped in elegant fabric reaches out for Erin).*

Erin:  *(SD: With awe)* No, not at all.

*SD: Erin, feeling the majesty of B’s presence, straightens her posture and walks over to B. B smiles and takes hold of Erin’s elbow. B extends her right arm holding the cane in front of her.*

B:  Here you are, give her a whirl.

*SD: A gently takes hold of the cane with his right hand and takes a few steps toward stage left away from Erin and B. He assesses the weight of the cane in his hand and suddenly tosses it high in the air. Erin and A’s heads follow the cane as it moves up in the air and then as it falls back down landing in A’s hand. He then proceeds to perform a sort of baton twirling dance. Erin claps and cheers as he does this while B stands, holding onto Erin’s moving arm, quietly smiling.*

B:  Sounds impressive! What’s happening?
Erin: Your cane has transformed into a baton!

B: Oh, it’s been a while since she has flown through the air.

*SD: A continues to experiment with the cane, twirling and twisting it and his body attempting to choreograph some sort of routine. As he does this A subtly moves upstage allowing for Erin and B to take focus.*

B: Is there perhaps somewhere that I could sit?

Erin: Oh yes, absolutely! Um, do you, how shall I, is, is there a way —

B: *(SD: She gently squeezes Erin’s elbow) This is fine, (SD: She turns her face to meet Erin’s waiting for her to say her name).*

Erin: Erin. Um, I’m Erin.

A: *(SD: Squeezes her arm once again smiling) This is fine, Erin, just fine.*

*SD: They both walk over to the stool. As they do, B scatts out a rhythm akin to that of New Orleans style jazz. B effortlessly sits atop the high stool and crosses her legs. Her beautiful garments cascade down and around the stool making it look as though she is floating in the air. As she continues to scatt, Erin looks on with admiration.*

Erin: You sound amazing!

*SD: B smiles and continues. After a moment she pauses.*

B: Why don’t you join me?
Erin: Oh, no, I, I couldn’t. I, I wouldn’t know how to even begin.

B: You ever listened to music before?

Erin: Yeah.

B: Well then!

Erin: Yeah, but I don’t, I don’t have any instruments with me.

B: Well don’t start waiting for those too! *Improvise...*

Erin: Improvise?

B: Think of a trumpet, how it calls, almost announcing its presence, shifting your body from side to side. *(SD: She makes the sounds of a trumpet).* Now a base, it brings you low and moves your body, grounding the melody *(SD: Her body and voice become that of a base).* And then there’s the scoop of the trombone, raising you up to the tss, tss, tss of the cymbal and then the drum, well, the drum it just keeps you going. *(SD: She brings all the sounds together, her body moving as through she were a band).* You’ve got to hear the rhythm, listen to it, feel it and then talk too it, communicate with it,

*Improvise...*

Erin: Improvise.
Listen for the rhythm, it’s there, let it come to you, let your whole body feel it, it’s there but it won’t announce itself, you have to listen for it and then, ba, ba, ba you’ll wonder how you went so long without it! *(SD: She continues to scatt).*

*SD: Erin closes her eyes, trying to feel the rhythm. B continues to scatt. A’s movement upstage becomes audible, there is a rhythm and sound to his movements that is in some ways harmonic with B. Both A and B, seemingly unaware, start riffing off each other, their rhythm growing louder and more intricate. Erin’s body starts to move slightly to their rhythm, her eyes pop open, she feels both A and B’s sounds.*

*(SD: In-between scatting)* So, you are waiting for blindness.

*(SD: Moving her body to the rhythm)* Um, yes, yes I am.

And, you are certain that blindness will show?

No, not exactly certain but I don’t have any reason to think it won’t.

*SD: A runs down to join Erin and B.*

This is pretty neat — there is so much you can do with it!

*SD: A begins tap dancing with the cane as a prop.*

*(SD: Through laboured breath)* Don’t we move well together?

*SD: Erin and B laugh.*
B: Yes from the sounds of it you two are really quite something!

A: Watch this!

*SD: As A is fiddling with the cane and his jacket, Erin and B are subtly moving their bodies to a rhythm audible only to them.*

A: *(SD: With his back to Erin and B) Hang on, give me one second!*

B: You better be worth the wait!

A: *(SD: A spins to face Erin and B with excitement) Look! What am I?*

B: *(SD: Chuckling) You’re gonna have to give me a bit more than that!*

Erin: *(SD: Perplexed) Yeah, I agree too! (Erin turns to B with levity) He is sanding with your cane through the arms of his jacket, his arms stretched out on each side with his head tilted and, *(SD: She walks over to A, looks at his face and then turns and walks back to B) and a silly grin on his face.*

*SD: A voice comes from the wings of stage left.*

C: *(SD: With a surly demeanour) He’s a scarecrow.*

*SD: C enters.*

A: Yes! That’s it!
C: Yeah, I know. Had you added some sound effects, like the sounds of crows, your little audience here would have clued in much quicker and you would have been done with the whole thing.

SD: A looks at C with awkward confusion.

A: Um, thanks for the input.

C: Not to interrupt The Wizard of Oz here but, what are you all doing just hanging around?

Erin: Hi! Um, you’re not interrupting anything actually. We’re, we’re not part of anything, well I’m not at least. I’m just waiting and these two, well we’re all just kind of here at the moment. (SD: She lets out a bit of a laugh).

A & B: Hi!

C: (SD: Dismissive) Hi. So, you two are just here, here doing what? And you, you’re waiting? Waiting for what?

A: (SD: Walks downstage dramatically still as the scarecrow) Excuse me! I am not just “here” I am in exploration. (SD: He turns to Erin and B sounding almost wounded) I was a scarecrow. The cane and I were a scarecrow.

Erin & B: (SD: Amplified) Ohhhhh!
SD: A is struggling to remove the cane, flailing his arms attempting to shake the cane from inside his jacket.

C: Anyways, since you are all here but don’t have to be (SD: Distracted by A) perhaps, perhaps, you could move along. (SD: With frustration to A) Would you like some assistance with that?

SD: A is now rocking his body from side to side like the pendulum of a clock, trying to slide the cane out from either sleeve. He nods dramatically.

A: Yes, please! Before I get seasick!

Erin: (SD: To B with familiarity) He is rocking back and forth trying to get your cane to slide out of his sleeves!

B: (SD: With a vigorous laugh) OH!

SD: C pulls the cane from the sleeve of A’s left arm as A falls to the floor. He lays there, moaning, focusing on his breathing, trying not to be sick. C instinctively folds the cane.

C: I’m assuming this does not belong to you?

A: (SD: Queasily) No, it’s not mine, it’s hers. (His arm shoots up and points in the direction of Erin and B).

SD: Silence.
Erin:  *(SD: Quickly)* The cane belongs to her.

B:  *(SD: Pensively)* Yes, she belongs to me.

*SD:* C walks over and places the cane in B’s hand. A finally regains his composure and stands.

A:  Oh. My. Gosh. That is one tough cane!

C:  So, as I was saying, if you all don’t mind moving —

B:  Mind moving? Not at all, can’t stop, do it all the time. *(SD: B moves her body as she scatts out a rhythm).*

A:  *(SD: Impressed)* OH! Very nice!

C:  *(SD: Speaking overttop B)* What are you waiting for?

Erin:  Blindness.

C:  Blindness! *(SD: Annoyed)* You’ve got to be kidding me? Blindness. You are here waiting for blindness. What a waste of time! Don’t you see —

A:  *(SD: Defending Erin)* Yes, she does! A little of this but not so much of that! And she is not wasting her time because things are happening —

C:  Things are happening?
A: Yes. They are. Things are on the way out and in the process of arriving and there is an oily galaxy in her eye that she is trying to float in and then in you come and, and, she is very busy!

C: Oh, is she? And, you?

A: Me?

C: Yes, what are you doing?

B: (SD: Breaks from scatting) Moving, doing, quicker, time. If I didn’t know any better I would say you are on the clock!

C: (SD: Avoiding B) I just don’t think it’s wise for people to waste their time on nothing when anything could happen. And, I certainly don’t think that waiting for blindness is in any way doing anything for you at all besides wasting your time and now mine.

A: Now, that was mean.

C: Mean? You think I am mean — why does everyone say that? How am I mean, telling you not to waste your time! Caring about what you do! But no, I’m mean. Go ahead, wait! See if I care!

SD: C storms off stage. Erin, A and B fall silent.

Erin: Do you two think I am wasting my time?
B: Depends, how much time have you got?

A: Yeah, I mean, if you have a lot then there is some to spare so why not! But, if you know you don’t have much, well then, I’m not sure. It depends really on you.

Erin: I don’t know. How does anyone know?

A: It also depends on what you are spending your time on.

B: Time and its value really depends on how you relate to what it is you are doing.

Erin: Waiting.

B: Yes.

Erin: For blindness.

B: And, (SD: B stands, flicks her wrist and her cane transforms from being folded to a solid length) I suppose it also depends on what it is you hope for once your waiting has come to an end.

Erin: Once blindness has arrived. What I hope for after blindness?

B: When the wait is over only then can you really know if you were wasting your time.

SD: B begins humming out a melody, poses, touches her hair once again to ensure its neatness and does a quick snap, slide of her cane to assess her surroundings.

A: (SD: Shock with a hint of terror) Wait! Are you leaving?
B: Be sure to remember and feel for that rhythm, you can’t lose something that is all around you but you sure can take it for granted.

Erin: I’ll try.

SD: A runs over to B.

B: (SD: B scatts and then pauses).

A: (SD: A Scatts and then pauses). What do you say?

B: (SD: Pause) Come on! (SD: The two exit rifting off each other).

SD: C storms on stage ranting.

C: …And, another thing, (SD: He looks around with confusion) there were, there were three of you, where, where did the other two go?

Erin: They left.

C: Finally came to their senses eh, well good for them.

Erin: (SD: Moving to sit atop the stool) Yup.

C: Settling in for a long-days wait are we?

Erin: (SD: Resuming her seated position from the top of the act, she stares) Yup.

C: (SD: Flabbergasted) And, how will you know when it gets here hmm, that blindness
you are so sure but not so sure is coming?

Erin: I’ll know.

C: How?

Erin: I’ll know.

C: How? How will you know?

Erin: (SD: Overcome by frustration and emotion) I’ll feel it, I will see it, I will know because then everything will be okay, everything will fit and I, I won’t feel so, I won’t feel so, so, like this! I won’t feel like this, I will know because things will be different.

C: And, then what?

Erin: And then things will be different.

C: From what? From the way things are now, the way they used to be or could be? Different how and really, what then? What then? Stop wasting your time! Your blindness isn’t coming. Erin —

Erin: Don’t say that.

C: Your blindness isn’t coming, Erin —

Erin: It is! It is coming!

C: Open your eyes Erin.
Erin: They are! I am! I see more than you could ever imagine! My blindness is coming and
don’t you dare try to tell me otherwise, don’t you dare! Shouldn’t you be moving on
anyhow? Shouldn’t you be doing something or be somewhere by now? What do you
care anyways? If you ask me, you’re the one who’s wasting their time, not me.

C: (SD: Pause) Yeah, what do I care for. You’re right. You sit here, you just wait. I’m sure
blindness is just around the corner.

SD: Erin sits atop her high bar-like stool looking off in the distance at nothing in particular but
at everything in general. C stands, still looking at Erin. After a moment, he takes a white ID cane
out of his pocket and opens it. He turns upstage with his back facing the empty audience and
sweeps the area in front of him to get a sense of his surroundings. His cane makes a sound
different from but not unlike that of B. He turns his head stage right to look at Erin once more,
she does not move. He turns away and walks upstage disappearing.

Final Curtain.
EPILOGUE

While “Blindness in V Acts” both acts as and is the title of my dissertation, it also is the premise upon which my dissertation rests. My work begins and ends with the premise that blindness in particular and disability in general may be understood as a performance or as a doing. In this sense, blindness does appear in Acts. These Acts represent the various situations and contexts in which blindness appears and in which it must be performed in order to make an appearance. This dissertation attempts to explicate the reflexivity of appearance through a dramatic exploration of its presentation in the world.

To this end, I have made extensive use of the work of Erving Goffman as a way to demonstrate the interactional aspect of blindness. I am not suggesting, however, that blindness is an “act” in the sense that it is merely a performance and does not have any substance. I am suggesting, though, that without the performance of blindness, it remains solely in the grasp of sight. The presentation of a self, be it a blind self or any self, requires an understanding of that self, otherwise no presentation. I have attempted in the V Acts of this dissertation to release blindness from the grasp of sight, showing the doing of blindness in various situations including medicine, education, the street, the home, my home, myself and the self. This showing of blindness unravels the interactional work of its presentation, requiring some understanding that blindness comes in different shapes. In terms of blindness, one size, or performance, does not fit all.

Such an understanding of blindness is one that I too am becoming acquainted with. The writing and subsequent completion of this dissertation presents itself on the tenth anniversary of my blindness. A decade of which being blind and blindness has confused, haunted, entertained,
intrigued, inspired and, among many other things, left me yearning for… something. Consider the opening sentence from Georgina Kleege’s book, *Sight Unseen* (1999), where she tells us, “writing this book made me blind” (p.1). At first blush this might appear odd since Kleege was blind both before and during the writing of her book. Writing her book, in this sense, could not have *made* her blind; she already was. And yet she tells us, “writing this book made me blind.” What sense do we make of this?

Writing this dissertation made *me* blind. These pages mark the first time I explored my blindness in a sustained systematic way and reflected on the ways in which I experience blindness. I explored the meaning of it, its being, my relation to it, my understanding of it and, equally important, what I feel about both blindness and about being blind. In this sense, writing this dissertation allowed me to discover what I had been yearning for — *my* blindness. Writing this dissertation allowed me to *be* blind. The *being* and subsequent *doing* of blindness, for the better part of this past decade, has been one fraught with mixed emotions and feelings.

In his book, *Community*, Zygmunt Bauman (2001) tells us, “Words have meaning: some words, however, also have a ‘feel.’ The word community,” he says, “is one of them” (p. 1). So, too, is blindness. It has both a meaning, or more accurately, meanings and a feel, feelings. This dissertation represents a variety of meanings that blindness held for me, not the least of which is the acquisition of blindness.

*Going blind*, to use a common adage, is not always as clear as it appears. Knowing when blindness occurs is not always obvious. In everyday life it seems as if it is obvious insofar as if you are blind, you cannot see, and if you are not blind, you can. This is precisely the position initially held by A in Act V. His confusion, however, was not his alone since Erin, too, was not
certain of her blindness. She waited for it. What was it that she was waiting for? Equally as important, where was she waiting for it? She was, after all, perched precariously atop a high bar-like stool as she waited. This precariousness represented that of not only her blindness, but the precariousness of her sight as well. One was going, and yet, the other did not yet arrive, at least Erin couldn’t see it there. She sat, yearning for one haunted by the other.

WHOSE BLINDNESS IS IT ANYWAY?

Earlier, I said that I was waiting for my blindness. This suggests that there is a blindness somewhere that is mine and only mine; it also suggests that I can own this blindness… once I find it. What is interesting, though, is that Erin in Act V waited for her blindness; she didn’t go out looking for it. This wait implies that while someone is blind, they are not blindness. Thus, my blindness while in my life must also, in some ways, be in the lives of others. Let me explore this collective sense of blindness by reflecting on Act V.

Erin is alone. She sits, atop a high bar-like stool, cross-legged. She stares, seemingly, at everything in general and at nothing in particular. This is, of course, an assessment of her appearance, her “presentation of self” to the world in which she sits, precarious as it may be, atop a high bar-like stool. Although she may appear as such, Erin is not looking at everything in general but indeed at something in particular — her oil spot. Erin “looks” to the world and to A as if she is sighted. She sits atop a stool and looks as if she is “staring off into space,” a common performance of unfocused sight. But, she is not. She is staring at her blindness.

When A enters the theatre, he is thrown by Erin’s presence. He did not expect to see someone sitting alone in an empty theatre on stage atop a high stool doing what appears to him as nothing. His ready-at-hand performative move is to smile at Erin, to visually show her that he
sees her, thus acknowledging her. Although Erin cannot see A, she knows from the sound of the
door opening, that someone has entered the theatre or, at the very least has seen her through an
open door. She too smiles, a performative move that visually shows and, in this sense, performs
seeing A. The stage has been set for sight both Erin and A have showed each other their “vision.”

Before A entered, Erin was alone and blind. Now, in the presence of A, her blind self is
split. Recall, she is waiting for blindness and for her blindness specifically. At the same time,
however, she is looking at an oil spot. The spot is not external to her something that not only she
can see but something that sighted people can also see. It is visible only to her and while she sits,
waiting for her blindness, she knows that the oil spot at which she is looking means and even
feels like she is blind. Erin’s duality of being\footnote{Michalko (2008) makes use of W.E.B. DuBois’s concept of “twoness” and “double consciousness” in relation to race in order to explicate the presence of sight in blindness.} is achieved when in the presence of others. A
allows for both Erin’s sight and blindness to be onstage with her. This is not to say that sight is
not with her since it is. I am suggesting that sight makes an appearance in a blind person’s life
directly when they are with others. The stage, everyday life, calls for the potential of both
blindness and sight. Sight, however, dominates every scene of everyday life in that it de-
emphasizes blindness as wholly legitimate and removes it altogether as a way of being equal to
sight. In this Act sight is foreground. Even though B and C and to a lesser extent, Erin make
blindness predominant, it is A (sight) that moves the predominance of blindness aside thus
allowing for the domination of sight. B does “push A around,” but she does not dominate the
Act. At most, B’s role is to keep sight at bay in order to give Erin an opportunity to “see” that her
blindness is already with her and there is no need for her to wait.
A’s entrance and Erin’s response makes the space not only a sighted one but one where the performance is dominated by sight. Erin heard a door open but, of course, saw no one enter nor did she see A as he stood at the table in the audience seating in front of her. Moreover, she did hear A speak, but did not see A. Initially, A saw Erin, but did not see blindness, that Erin was blind. Like A’s sight, Erin’s blindness was also silent.

The potential for and of blindness is upstaged by sight. When Erin and A interact the notion of waiting for blindness, of Erin waiting for her “blind self” is understood as a “funny sort of thing” and is even challenged by A — ”is that something you can just sort of wait for?” A’s version of blindness is not something that is waited for but rather something that simply is or is not. You either are or are not that.

Erin, however, is not as certain of this as is A. Somewhere, something is happening. Her sight is leaving, already on its way and yet, she can see an oil spot — something has arrived. She can see something that exists in the world, a sight that can and has been seen, she can see something that belongs on a driveway, something that A has seen himself. But, this particular oil spot is not in the world in the way that other oil spots are. A, for instance, cannot see it. It is not in his world, in the world of sight. In this sense, Erin’s oil spot is hers; it is not seeable in the way sights in the sighted world are. And yet, it is recognizable to A as an oil spot when Erin describes it. Thus, it is hers and not hers. It is as though Erin is doing, not audio, but visual description. She is describing her oil spot, one that only she can see to A. A recognizes her spot by virtue of sight; the sighted world holds oil spots. It is important to note that Erin is not seeing an oil spot. She is seeing something that looks like an oil spot, one that she, too, has seen years ago. It is in this way that Erin’s oil spot belongs both to her and to others.
The sights of Erin’s blindness mark an in-betweenness of being. Much like the stage she waits on, she is caught in-between performances and is left without knowing what to do. And so, she waits. A’s orientation to Erin’s waiting may be understood as the curiosity of sight toward what it cannot see, in this case, blindness. A looks for Erin’s blindness around the theatre and even in his own eyes struck by how Erin could be seeing something right in front of her that somehow evades him.

The music that precedes B’s entrance may be understood as the sounds of blindness that go unseen by sight. A hears B before he can see her. This short, but dynamic moment is dominated by A’s eyeballs frantically searching for the source of the music while Erin remains still, staring at her blindness.

THE MANYNESS OF BLINDNESS

Michalko’s (1999) exploration of blindness has led him to reveal the possibility of, “many blindnesses” (p.180). Act V takes up Michalko’s revelation and begins to unravel what I call the manyness of blindness through the characters of B and C. Both characters represent versions of blindness that are performed on the stage of everyday life. They also depict versions of what blindness might desire and also how blindness may be expressed.

B’s entrance precedes her. The sounds of B’s blindness fill the theatre setting the stage for her arrival, a stage previously set with A and Erin presenting a stage of confusion, uncertainty and bewilderment. The stage was sighted and yet not. Like in Act III when Erin stood on the threshold of the classroom there was a version of blindness that awaited both Erin’s, and in Act V, B’s arrival. However, unlike Erin, B did not simply enter the space. She infused the space with blindness. The musicality of her movements filled the space before she arrived,
signalling to A that something or someone was coming. The sounds of blindness intrigued A but did not serve to move Erin. Despite B’s rhythm she remained still, staring into her oil spot. The bewildering sound and colourful entrance of blindness embodied in B was not yet perceived by Erin. A does not perceive B as an expression of blindness but as the blindness belonging to Erin. “Oh! Look! There! There is your blindness!”

B’s bejewelled sparkling cane is the first sight of blindness. It catches the light radiating out and into A’s eyeballs capturing and enhancing the sights of his vision. This cane is one that oozes sight but more poignantly is one infused with blindness. The white cane may be understood as being synonymous with blindness. It is used for orientation and mobility purposes and as an identification of blindness in everyday life. B’s bejewelled sparkling cane serves both these purposes and then some. When B emerges from the wings her blindness is foregrounded. She looks, sounds and acts blind; B is blind and she loves to be. It is B’s relation to her blindness that captures Erin’s attention and jolts her from her oil spot. B is not waiting for blindness. She is blind.

B identifies the bejewelled sparkling cane as a “she” and uses “her” to keep sight (A) and his curiosities at a cane’s-length-distance from her. It may appear as though B is “pushing A around,” but by keeping him at bay, B is showing a version of the manyness of blindness that might otherwise be enveloped by A’s curiosity and desire to see and experience what it cannot, blindness. Erin’s admiration of B is not routed in a curiosity in the way that A’s is but rather, it is more of a marvelling at what she, Erin, might and could be.

The many possibilities of blindness is explored by A as he is occupied with and by B’s cane. Located just upstage from Erin and B, A is caught up trying to see blindness, almost
simulating it. His twirling and dancing with the cane leads to A’s capture. He is captured by the cane, confused by it and can barely get out of blindness. This capture takes place behind Erin and B. As A desperately struggles to free his self of blindness, B sits seductively on Erin’s stool while Erin stands at her side. “Why don’t you join me?” B says to Erin. B represents the seductive character of blindness, a seduction that makes the contemporary disability studies adage “desiring disability” possible in a sense deeper than rhetoric. Both begin to feel the rhythm of blindness, a rhythm that is not waited for, but rather revealed.

C’s entrance precedes him as well, not with the musicality of blindness but rather with his surly interpretation of its rhythm. Unlike B, who scatted with the rhythm of her cane, C entered with an authoritative booming speaking voice. “He’s a scarecrow.” C is the pragmatic version of blindness in everyday life. To wait for blindness, to him, is to waste one’s time. Unlike B, C does not love to be blind but rather just is blind. C is a version of blindness caught somewhere between the love of blindness (B) and the desire of Erin to be blind. It is especially important to note that it is C who assists A when he becomes captured by B’s cane. A is stuck, unable to release his self from the simulation of blindness in which he finds himself. He is a scarecrow and it is C who comes to his aid.

The manyness of blindness is expressed throughout all Acts of this dissertation. Act I, The Genesis of Blindness, shows the medical version of blindness. This Act bares the conception of blindness through the doctor-patient interaction, “Tell me again, what is it you are seeing?” The doctor interprets blindness as physical, as a “thing” in the form of a function without which sight cannot be produced, at least not normally. “You really need an MRI and then I will know for sure.” This interpretation cultivates the understanding of blindness as a bio-medical phenomenon that is isolated within an individual and named. In this interpretation, Erin’s eyes
are no longer her own. They are not an expression of Erin but become the eyes of Erin. They belong to something else, Stargardt’s Disease and to someone else, ophthalmologists (it, after all, named it and thus claimed it), more specifically, ocular geneticists. In this sense, blindness becomes a “thing” that “happens” to a person. In the “case” of Erin, the eyes.

This happening, typically understood as a misfortune and a loss is further medicalized as a loss brought on by the thing that must be grieved and dealt with. The loss of sight and subsequent acquisition of blindness is made to touch many branches of medicine starting with ophthalmology and moving, for example, to psychology.

Act I takes us through the early days and years of blindness where doctors and medical professionals pass patients, Erin, between and among each other. Such “referrals” are made in an attempt to gain knowledge of blindness for research purposes with the justification also of helping the patient understand their newfound blindness. This is one of the ways blindness becomes a that.

Blindness, I have that.

Blindness, I don’t want that.

Look at that, how sad.

The genesis of Erin’s blindness began with an oil spot. She saw something, a something that was familiar but a something whose presence was inappropriate, something uncanny. Medicine and all its practitioners sought to explain such an uncanny presence. This epistemological interpretation of blindness left Erin knowing she was indeed blind but did not
provide her with a sense of being; there was no ontological perspective, just a *that*. This is one of the “many blindesses” Michalko speaks of and Erin is left with.

Act II, Emotion and the School of Hard Knocks, depicts blindness in the realm of education. Here, the version of blindness that is explored and experienced by Erin is one that must be schooled. Blindness needs to be educated and educated by sight: *blindness must be taught to see*\(^\text{24}\). And, what better teacher than sight? The blindness Erin was given by medicine shifts, ever so slightly, from a bio-medical phenomenon to a technical problem. How can Erin exist in the classroom? How can she be a student and a graduate student at that if she cannot see? If she is a *that* (blind) how will she learn?

From the point of view of education, blindness is a technical problem requiring a technical solution (accommodation). Students who are not *that* (blind/disabled) are interpreted as not “in need of” accommodation since education and the classroom are designed with “them” in mind. The process of accommodation for blind students, or, in the argot of education, students who are blind, is a version of blindness and disability that requires identification and documentation. “Oh wait do you have medical documentation? Something from a reputable physician supporting your claims? In this case that you are, permanently blind?”

Access to education becomes a bureaucratic response to the technical problem and “claim” of blindness. There were files to be made, forms to be filled out, letters to write and processes to be followed. Erin was required to know her blindness in such a way that she could negotiate and manage it thus enabling her to be a student “just like” her sighted peers. But, as

\(^{24}\) For an analysis of the notion of educating the sensorium, see Titchkosky (2008).
dramatized in Act II, relying on bureaucracy alone was not going to make the university an accessible place.

Act II revealed the version of blindness that is for the benefit of those who see. Erin was called on to manage, “get the hang of” and to “figure out for herself” how to be the version of blindness that was expected and accepted in education. “Not to worry, next class you will feel much better, every new grad student experiences imposter syndrome.” Such a statement reflects the “type” of blindness required (desired?) by education, a blind self that is removed, an “every” student that is not blind but rather experiencing “imposter syndrome.” This Act, too, reflects the manyness of blindness.

Everyday life, the rhythm and feel of our taken-for-granted mundane movements, the minute details of life is the stage upon which yet another version of blindness is performed and lived. Act III, Blindness in the Street, explicates the dramatic life of blindness. In this act the silent-world-of-sight demands the improvisational character of blindness. Erin must make it through the “thicks” and “thins,” the twists and turns of her bustling city, reading a text that is written without her, one that is composed by those who cannot see her. The movements of her day are characterized by tapping into the rhythm of the city, the rhythm of the street, the rhythm of life. This rhythm is one that is contrapuntal to that of Erin’s, of blindness. Such a rhythm dominates Erin’s movements, calling on her to pass as someone she is familiar with but whose presence is fading. It is this call to and dominance of passing in the streets that may complicate Erin’s relation to her blindness and may be one of the reasons why she, in Act V, sits atop a high bar-like stool… waiting for blindness.
Act IV, At Home By Myself With You, is an intimate portrait of blindness. Blindness needs to be lived and sometimes blindness is lived at home by itself with a “you” that is hers alone. Act IV shows how when blindness is lived as an individual thing, as something that is a part of an individual and not something experienced in the midst of others, fears, tears and a blind self is unleashed. This unleashing is not always experienced as a freedom. While blindness is at home by itself, there is always a you, a watchful eye that demands the blind person to constantly be caught in the middle of what she sees and how she should see. The watchful eye of the mirror in Erin’s apartment alludes to that of the watchful eye of the silent-sighted-world, the you to Erin’s blindness. Erin’s image is reflected back to her by the mirror in her apartment. Although she cannot see herself and, despite the fact that she turns her back to the mirror, she can see and feel herself watching her blind self. This sense of reflected-blind-surveillance is something that haunts Erin and I am suggesting at times haunts all blind people. Thus, Act IV is a version of blindness that many blind people have experienced and will continue to be haunted by.

Act V, The Spector of a Home, does not rid the world of blindness; it unveils it. Blindness is often understood as a oneness, a way of being in the world transformed into a that. This dissertation seeks to unveil the that of blindness as a manyness. Blind people negotiate the medical, educational, street and home life of blindness not only because they exit in culture but also because culture exists in them given that blind people, as everyone else, live in and through culture.
Recall Bauman’s (2001) sentiments: “Words have meaning: some words, however, also have a ‘feel.’ The word community is one of them” (p. 1). So, too, is the word blindness.

I have demonstrated that the meaning of blindness is many fold and not singular and monolithic. The most dominant meaning of blindness is lack of sight. This meaning is moralistic in the sense that we should see, but do not. And, those of us who are blind do not see because we cannot. We want to, but we lack the function of sight that would permit us to see. Thus, blindness means darkness; it means tragedy; it means sadness; it means despair and it means fix it or adapt. Such meanings conjure the contemporary sighted feel of blindness, namely, horror. Proponents of the sighted world often, if not always, feel a sense of horror when imagining or considering blindness. That would be horrible!

The manyness of blindness flows from this dominant meaning. And yet, we, blind people, are not simply representative of loss or lack of function that is expressed through a desire to see that is unattainable and thus a horrible existence. We are also expressions of embodied engagement with the world and with the many ways of being in the world. The manyness flows from experiencing the horror that is said to be blindness and from the feel that more than horror may be expected from blindness. The manyness of blindness is, in this sense, the resistance if not the outright rejection of the oneness of blindness as sheer and utter horror.

I have tried to show in all V acts that blindness has both meaning and a feel. This feel does not coincide with the sighted imaginings of blindness but rather, it is a feel that exists in concert with the cultivation of a desire to want to make more of blindness than what society gives it, more than mere horror. Yet, sometimes the feel and the meaning of blindness seem
almost harmonic. For example, Erin, particularly in Act I, understood her oil spot as something that was out of place and something to be uncertain of and fear. In Act II the meaning and feel of blindness was more a contrapuntal harmony. Erin knew that being a blind student meant that she was in need of accommodation and yet she was the one accommodating the university.

The sense of the manyness of blindness I have attempted to depict in this dissertation is almost polyrhythmic. I am not suggesting that manyness, following Michalko, does not bear an orientation of the manyness of meanings and a feel. Instead, I am suggesting that manyness reflects the idea that blindness represents the occasion and that blind people have the opportunity to engage the culture in which they find themselves by attending to its rhythms.

For example, in the first IV acts I depicted cultural rhythms through the theatrical device of a chorus. The chorus of characters appeared with Erin in various cultural settings she, with her blindness, made an appearance. The chorus acted as both the harmonic and the contrapuntal background to Erin’s search for the meaning of her blindness as she felt it. Occasionally, the chorus would appear in discord with Erin.

The strongest commitment I have tried to express in this work is the dramatic character of blindness. The feel of my blindness and subsequently the blindness of others came to me through a set of rhythms. The sense of the dramatic character of blindness was something I needed to explore and to express. The theatre is my rhythm and I live my blindness, in large part, through its rhythms. I choose theatre as the primary method of expressing my exploration of the phenomenon of blindness.
REFLEXIVE INFLUENCE

I want, finally, to briefly comment on the influence of disability studies on my work. At the same time, I want to briefly touch on the influence blindness and this dissertation has on disability studies. Thus, reflexive influence.

Disability studies often, if not always, argues against disability specific work. This suggests that all disabilities are subject to similar cultural forces such as oppression. Whether we are blind or wheelchair users, we are subject to the discriminatory features of a culture’s ideology of ability. In this sense, specific disability becomes nearly irrelevant to disability studies. This disability non-specific orientation, it might be said, contributed to the advent of such fields as Deaf Studies and MAD Studies.

And yet, the influence of disability studies can be found throughout this dissertation. It has given me the understanding that my blindness is not merely an individual problem to which I must seek out and find solutions. Instead, it has shown me that my blindness is deeply cultural and thus collective in character. This orientation has influenced greatly the writing of this dissertation.

Still, blindness is a disability specific to me and to other blind people. To wrap it in non-specific disability risks losing the influence of blindness not only on disability studies but on the world as well. Blindness does, after all, present the possibility of a perception quite different from that, commonly understood, as coming along with sight. Still, how to express this perception and what it perceives in ways other than visual, remains at the heart of this dissertation and, hopefully, will remain always in all of my future work. The specific character of blindness can teach disability studies something more than human rights, disability rights, the
need for inclusion, and the like. It can teach all of us, disability studies, sighted people and blind people that what blindness perceives may reveal a new understanding of the world. This is the way, I believe, my dissertation influences disability studies and also may pave the way for Blind Studies. This remains “to be seen.”
REFERENCES


http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol5/iss3/23


Kudlick, C. J. (2009). Disability history: Why we need another “other.” In Titchkosky, T., & Michalko, R. (Eds.), *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader.* (pp. 31-37). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars’ Press.


http://www.screenplay.com/about-us/