

DRAMA:

Silent Screams

Characters:

Valerie (aged 31)

Psychiatrist (voice)

Deep voice

Narrator (voice):

Pain is the single most common issue which urges people to seek medical care as well as the most common symptom that indicates an onset of a disease or the disease itself. Is pain a signal, a symptom, an emotion or a disease? Why do we hurt? Causes of pain may be physical, mental, social or spiritual. Pain is a subjective sensation and is difficult to measure. The link between art and pain is firm and unbreakable. Art can be used as a therapeutic technique for those in pain, as well as one of the prime methods of raising public awareness regarding the issue of pain. Moreover, art can be one of the most powerful forms of educating healthcare professionals and the creators of healthcare policies on the importance of recognizing and treating pain.

Among the complex medical issues connected to pain, self-harm is particularly interesting. Self-harm is an activity which results in self-inflicted wounds. The most common method is cutting the surface of the skin with sharp objects. It's a syndrome which is present in all cultures and socioeconomical classes. There is an increased risk of suicide among people who suffer from self-harm, although generalizing cutting as suicidal behaviour is inappropriate. Self-harm can be a symptom of emotional instability (borderline personality disorder), still, individuals suffering from depression, anxiety, addiction, eating disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia and other personality disorders can also fall victims to self-harm. It is also present among highly functional individuals who have no clinical diagnosis. There are various motives for self-harm. Sometimes it is a coping mechanism which offers temporary relief from intense negative emotions (anxiety, depression, stress, emotional emptiness, rage, feeling of rejection, etc.), as well as other mental traits such as perfectionism or low self-esteem. It is often connected to a history of trauma and abuse, including emotional and sexual abuse. The neurobiological

connection of inducing physical pain in order to reduce emotional pain is interesting since inflicted injuries induce the secretion of endogenous opioids and other neurotransmitters. Scientists are unsure why self-harm among youth is on the rise and how to prevent the trend, which is not being discussed enough although it can bear serious repercussions. How to prevent this behavior and treat these people? How to encourage them to seek help? To whom should they turn? Are we thinking about this young generation and do we care about them? How to get to the root of the pain? How to turn pain into pleasure and joy of life without self-harm?

In the following presentation we will shed some light on the internal experiences of a person dealing with this issue. The depiction of a therapy session using art is part of the multimedia. "Communication against Pain" project, the goal of which is to point out pain as an omnipresent global phenomenon, as well as human suffering, which we, as humanists by profession, wish to and will finally suppress. Only through our creativity and by offering collective help to those who are in pain are we able to feel good. It all lies in human interaction.

after the typewritten text appearing on the screen comes to its end, a video of ***Black Tattoo, a song by Damir Urban featuring Stjepan Hauser, is played:***

Zemlja kao pauk plete mrežu oko nas, hitno trebam zraka, pluća su mi premala, jer ja sam crna rupa, black tattoo za ovaj grad, upijam iz tebe, loše u dobro pretvaram, ja idem jer hoću do neba ne mogu ja sam black tattoo u koži zemlje zauvijek ja sam black tattoo, black tattoo i ostajem.

(Valerie approaches stage center. She takes a few steps and stops. She speaks while standing)

Valerie: How many things had to happen for me to get here? But this time it's going to be different. *(she encourages herself)* I can do this.

(She continues to approach the stage center. She sometimes looks lost, unable to find her way to the doctor's office. Meanwhile, the lines of Damir Urban's Mjesto za mene can be heard: „Stoji netko usred mene, čistom voljom dodjeljen, tko me bira svog za sebe, sve što nosim kupuje.“ There is a chair standing on the right side of the stage and another one on the left. Next to the chair on the right, a tall fig is standing in the pot. Valerie approaches the chair on the right while a line of Damir Urban's song Mjesto za mene is heard reverberating: „Ima li tu mjesta za mene?“ She observes her surroundings and sits down. Her head is lowered but she raises it to utter)

Valerie: *(quietly)* „Your life's a play“, they told me. „Your life is layered.“ But they don't know just how many times the layers of my skin have been restored *(she inspects her arms)*.

I am waiting in the waiting room, waiting. What else would I do here? I know this fig. It is always here. It's in the same place, immobile. Only the dust on its surface varies. An odd yellow leaf. Is it dying? No, in spite of that, it grows. Do I grow? It has a couple of cuts across its leaves *(she touches the leaf)*. It's bound by the pot. I'm bound by my skin. The waiting room is beginning to fill *(murmur, steps are heard as well as various sounds made by other patients)* So many untold stories. Many questions, few answers. None, as a matter of fact. I'm left with the answers beneath my skin, vulnerable and open. I sometimes confine them inside a cocoon. But they'll never be butterflies. They'll never fly gracefully. No admiration. They're a Pandora's box.

Psychiatrist (voice): Good afternoon Valeria, How are you doing, today?

Valerie: Bad... just like any borderline. I genuinely belong there.

Psychiatrist (voice): Why do you think you belong there, amongst the borderlines?

Valerie: Because Self-injury. The relationships that I build are unstable. I change moods. As a genuine borderline. But, I've decided to tell you more about myself today. I brought some of the paintings that I did. *(she produces a collection of acrylic paintings from her bag)*

Psychiatrist (voice): Why today?

Valerie: Because a fork fell on my tiles yesterday.

Psychiatrist (voice): Did you pick it up?

Valerie: I watched. I often consider breaking a glass or the prettiest bowl I own. Dropping it. Breaking it. And watching it. *(She speaks coldly, relishing)* Hundreds of pieces scattered before me. Something so simple makes me shriek.

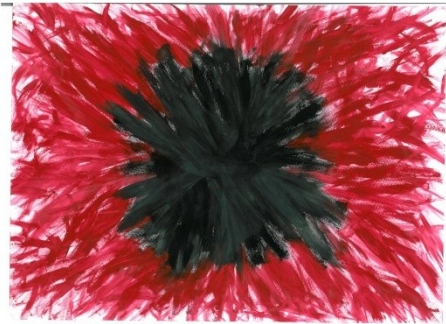
Psychiatrist (voice): Describe this shriek.

Valerie: A couple of voices conflict inside of me. They aren't hallucinations, they're inner parts of me. Like when dark clouds collide. One of them is black, enormous. Like a beast. It rests, sleeps. Sometimes it wakes. The others are afraid to confront it. One if them is me. It's torn among the others. Another one is good and commends me for doing the right thing. It gets overpowered, so I devised the Lady in White. She consoles me in the hardest of times. Like layers of skin.

Psychiatrist (voice): Layers of skin?

Valerie: Yes. My skin is dripping. Each layer slips into another. Everybody sees the surface. They sometimes say I'm preety, but I don't see myself that way. I know who I am best. I control

all of these layers. How deep they are, where they are, how they look... But beneath the red there is a dark blue that spills into black. (*Iznutra appears on the stage*)



The beast. The beast that I'm restraining by large and heavy chains.

Psychiatrist (voice): What does the beast represent? Can I talk to it?
(*Valerie shakes her head*)

Psychiatrist (voice): Why not?

Deep Voice: Because no one ever wins their fights.

Valerie: I have to control the beast. Otherwise it will burst all over the mist and return as ashes falling from the sky. (*Iznutra disappears, Glasovi appears. Valerie is in a prepsychotic state*)



It seems like their fights will go on forever. Voices.

Psychiatrist (voice) (*Glasovi u moru is shown*): What does this painting represent for you?

Valerie: It's called Voices in the Sea.. A human head made of voices.



A music clip is heard in the background (Unfinished life...)

Psychiatrist (voice): What if there are no voices, if the water is still? If there is no pain or suffering?

Valerie (*psychomotor unrest – arms, legs, uneasiness in her voice*): If there is no pain, there is a void. Calm water... No wind. No movement, no events. Boredom..

Psychiatrist (voice): And how do you feel when you're comfortable? Can you feel contentment?

Valerie: I like to write and paint, it's quite liberating.

Psychiatrist (voice): How would this painting look if you felt well?

Valerie: It would be orange. Warmth. Warmth that melts in contact with ice. I come across ice daily, in the falling of a fork, spilling of flour, anything out of control.

(Control appears)



Psychiatrist (voice): Control? Like in this painting?

Valerie: Just like that, control. Each line was painted just like I wanted it. Like taking a ruler and drawing geometrical shapes. Everything has its place. But then disquiet sets in, disarray. I splattered paint and disrupted their existence.

Psychiatrist (voice): What if there is no control?

Deep Voice: Boom! *(to the sound of music)*

Valerie: Shambles.

Psychiatrist (voice): I see there are a lot of obsessive-compulsive symptoms in play? Imposing thoughts and actions which are required to reduce the unbearable tension. And I hear another thing - you divide yourself into parts?

Valerie: Yes. There is the cheerful and kind me, but there is also the grave, somber me. I can't put them together and see them as a whole. It would hurt others more than it would hurt me. Pain..
(Kontrola disappears)

Psychiatrist (voice): Pain? Well what is pain to you?

Valerie *(responds as if blurting out associations, hurriedly, occasionally grabbing her head, restless, she talks louder and louder)*: Glass hands. Tears. Headache. Gray. Fog. Black. Red. Covered walls. Acrylic paint late at night. Night. Silence. Rage. Restlessness. Sharp objects. Tight skin. *(She stops. Uragan appears. She recalls, calming down)*



A hurricane. I am standing in the middle of it and all I can do is wait for it to pass. The hurricane snatches me.. I twirl along with it, become even weaker and finally collapse. *(the painting disappears)*

Psychiatrist (voice): Valerie, try to explain how you feel pain in more detail. Emotional and physical?

Valerie: It always starts with glass hands. *(she observes her forearms, extending them in front of her)* If I break them, I'll be walking on the shards barefoot. Their fragileness becomes flammable. That gleaming flame captivates my eyes. How much more can I take? My skin is filled with scars, but my soul... it is made of them. *(she shows the audience and the psychiatrist numerous scars on her forearms)* I am alone in the middle of the storm. The pain is my companion. I can't breathe anymore. *(she gasps for air)* I'm falling. My body is heavy. *(she covers her head with her hands, closes her eyes, speaks slower)* I am filled with pain. It spreads and takes over. It is always there. Waiting.

(The sound of pain is heard)

Psychiatrist (voice): Where is your pain located, Valerie? Where does it hurt?

Valerie: Sometimes my gut. *(she squeezes her stomach)* You want to open it and take it all out. *(she speaks faster)* Get rid of it and leave. But it is still cocooned inside of you, its hunger increases. *(she is showing feelings of convulsion, helplessness, pronounced discomfort)* Sometimes it's in the dawn. It tricks you into believing in a new beginning, while leading you into the dark night. I am dreaming of departure. Leaving it all. Same mistakes, same repetitions. Same limits, same words. Same roofs, same asphalt, the same redolence of a sundown. Yet I stay here. Seeing the same faces, same empty streets, same cafés filled with people's voices whose clamor weighs on my eyelids and tires my lips. Silence.

The smell of rain fills your lungs, but you can't make it stay. It bursts and takes over/infiltrates your heart.

Deep Voice: I can see your scars quite well under this light.

Valerie: Not all scars are visible. *(Slika Kako počne rezanje appears)*



Psychiatrist (voice): So, you've been cutting yourself since...

Valerie: Since I was fifteen.

Deep Voice: *(It discourages, mocks. It is a negative part of Valerie)* Don't you see you can't be helped? You're a hopeless cause.

Valerie: Stop it.

Deep Voice: I am always here for you, telling you the truth.

Psychiatrist (voice): How did it start?

Deep Voice: She first cut herself entering adolescence.

Valerie: Stop it, will you? „ Oh honey, we now what happened. You've been nervous.“ My mother would say.. All I had to do was answer: „Yes.“ My mother should have asked me why.

Deep voice: She wouldn't have gotten away that easily.

Valerie: Shut up. I told you!

Valerie: *(for the first time she describes how she started with self-harm, how she felt. It's hard for her, uncomfortable, embarrassing, yet at the same time enjoyable. She is touching her body, especially her arms)* There wasn't a single clock that showed the correct time anywhere in the room. It was a large time-hole. The pressure on my forehead was too strong. The tension became unbearable. „Am I really going to go to my prom looking like this?“ I thought. But, if they asked, I already had my answer prepared: „It's nothing, just a burst... capillary.“ In reality, my soul had been bursting for years. I knew from the start that I can't have scars in visible places. It was winter so I drew the last couple of lines across my arm. After that, I moved to my legs. However, that year we went to the seaside. I said that the scar was a...shaving mishap. No one suspected a thing. After that, I started cutting where no one would ever be able to see it – my lower abdomen. *(she shows with her hands)* The ideal spot. Yet, those scars faded as well. A couple of months passed and the urge grew stronger. I decided to cut over a spot on my hip covered by underwear. *(Rezanje disappears)*

Psychiatrist (voice): And all this time no one knew?

Deep Voice: No. She hid it skillfully. She used the dividers. *(Ludilo – prvi stadij appears)*



Valerie:. Blood is liberating.

Deep Voice: When night falls...

Valerie: Everything becomes real. I sometimes lie on the bed and stare at the ceiling with a smile on my face. Yes, that's the physical pain that I relish. I can breath. Finally, I did something right. *(Ludilo – prvi stadij disappears)* I always wondered, if I stared long enough into the darkness... would I turn into it?

Deep Voice: That's the trick. Although you're afraid of the dark, it's the only place where you can reveal your feelings.

Psychiatrist (voice): I notice a lot of imposing thoughts and actions to reduce tension. You told me that even before you began cutting, you communicated over the internet quite intensely...what was the world like and how did you perceive it as a fourteen, fifteen-year-old girl? From what you've told me, it seems you were suffering from childhood depression, on your own...

Valerie: I had a blog about self-harm. There were hundreds, thousands of young people who were doing the same, but we weren't encouraging it. We were each other's support. We shared our problems and issues. In fact, we needed someone to hear us out, someone to confide in.

(pauses, raises her voice for this is where she touches on the problem)

You knew you weren't alone, there were other people feeling the same way.

(Ludilo – drugi stadij appears)



Psychiatrist (voice): How do you feel when you cut? And afterwards? If that's something you're even able to talk about...

(blood is dripping, heartbeats are heard, Valerie shows great despair in spite of talking about pleasure)

Valerie: The act of cutting is incredibly pleasant. It's a release of emotions. The Native Americans would cut themselves once a month to free ill spirits from within.

Psychiatrist (voice): You told me that, lately, you've been telling your friend when you cut yourself. How do you tell her?

Valerie: I just do. In a sentence. *(she once again speaks brusquely, showing her obsessive-compulsive part)* But it's not a common sentence. Every word has its weight. A weight that they themselves are often unaware of, which most people find horrifying and scandalous. I might even end up in the evening news. *(Ludilo – drugi stadij disappears)*

Psychiatrist (voice): Have you been considering a career? What would you really like to do?

Valerie : Keep doing what I'm doing but without the pain. I've always loved acting; crawling inside a character's SKIN and exploring its vices and virtues. I'd run its lines like they were my own. I'd leave a part of me in every character. *(she changes the tone of her voice)* My life would be fulfilled if I knew I helped someone in their time of adversity.“ I want other people to understand that there is a way out. That would be my way out as well. God, I sure am opening quite a lot today. Can I really trust you?

Psychiatrist (voice): You can.

Deep Voice: Trust someone? That's been used up long ago.

Psychiatrist (voice): You wanted to tell me why you didn't go out with your friends.

Valerie *(as if roused from her thoughts)*: I was supposed to go out. I didn't.

Deep Voice: You have hideous legs.

Valerie: (*fighting with the voice*) I was tired.

Deep Voice: You look disgusting.

Valerie: My head hurt.

Deep Voice: Your gut is too big. You can go out when you're thinner.

Psychiatrist (voice): I hear you think poorly of your body. This painting.... (*9876543210 appears*)



Valerie: The head is tilted, the body grey, dried up, ribs are deteriorating, and the neck is thin as well. The black around the body. The obsession with numbers, naming the painting 9876543210. The counting of calories, to lose weight, from 9 to 0, to achieve 0, perfection.

Psychiatrist (voice): What exactly do your eyes see in the mirror?

Valerie: A body. An oversized belly. I see problematic skin, fat legs, insecurity. My eyes remind me of the eyes of a snake. I hate seeing myself in the mirror. , I can't stand the sight of me.

Psychiatrist (voice): What does this picture represent? (*Tablete appears*)



Valerie: Fear. To take the pill or not? Too often do doctors merely present the patient with a pill, saying: „This will help with your...“ whichever the patient's ailment is. No one tells you you can

contact them if you have any issues. Can't we at least set aside a moment for the other person and tell them how their body is going to be affected? I am extremely afraid of what's going to happen when I finish my therapy, seeing as I'm better already. How will I recover? Will my body get too dependent on the pills? All these thoughts are swarming through my head.

(Tablete disappears)

Psychiatrist (voice): What did your partner say to that? Do you have a partner at the moment?

Valerie: No. I saw too much.. I've had...bad experiences. I drank that night. There was this boy who I liked. He knew I was a virgin. We went for a walk... But ended up in a public restroom. He used me. He was sober. Later on we started seeing each other...the meetings mostly ended in sex. I was an object. Everything I did was to please him. The body is a whole that is easily damaged. But the scars on the soul are deeper. I could never achieve meaningful communication with men. My body is dried up. This thing is still happening...Over and over again... In my head... Used... Tossed aside. After he was done, I couldn't feel a thing. But I dug a hole deep enough to bury my memories in it. Their weight builds shackles.

Psychiatrist (voice): Do you have many shackles, Valerie?

Valerie *(closes her eyes, trying to remember everything, a torrent of emotions ensues)*: Too many. It hurts when I go out ashamed of my body. It hurts when I need someone to talk to, but no one's there. Am I going mad? Every piece of me is driving me crazy. I scream! I need help, and all that I feel is pain taking over me. It lives in me and grows, and grows, and grows and I can't take it anymore! You see, the streetcar is leaving. *(she points to the right as if a streetcar had just passed)* I have a desire to break into someone's apartment and pretend I've lived there forever. I'd know that couch, where my room is and that the pot in the third cabinet is dented. I miss the multicolored madness in my head. I think I'm becoming gray. It looks empty. A skeleton hanging from the ceiling. I am infected, this virus is taking my shape.

Psychiatrist (voice): Have you thought about death as well?

Valerie: Often. *(she sighs and contemplates)* There are moments when I'm afraid of death and there are those when I'm not. If I could, I would meet death and we would have a conversation. I respect death. And maybe I am bothered by it being a mere moment, I'd like to ask it about everything. *(it is essential to convey that she is not suicidal, yet there is a risk, for a certain part of these people commits suicide)*

Psychiatrist (voice): How do you perceive life?

Valerie: Life is extraordinarily complex. It consists of people, objects, nature... The mutable and the immutable. On the other hand, life is just a moment. And as I pronounced that sentence it has passed. But now it's taking place again and again and again and again. It can be observed from countless points of view. But there's only one life. Use it the best you can, considering the situation. Death will happen when it happens. Unless you initiate it.

Deep voice: Yes...but

Psychiatrist (voice): Do you want to get rid of this pain? How much are you motivated to change?

Valerie (*Fights the voices off*): Go away! I need control. Every time I pray to God, I somehow end up right beside the devil.

Deep Voice: Let it all out.

Psychiatrist (voice): Easy, calm down.

Valerie: I can't calm down! It wants out, it's knocking on the door, it's here already! Help me, hide me!

Deep Voice: There's nowhere to hide now! They're coming!

Psychiatrist (voice): Where do you want me to hide you?

Deep Voice: No one can help her.

Valerie: Get out! Go away!

Deep Voice: Drive them all away.

Valerie: Shut up! Where did I put the razors?! (*Valeria shouts. She goes through everything around her and suddenly yells at the Deep voice*) Where did you put them?!

Deep Voice: Under the chair. (*Valerie looks under it but doesn't find them*)

Valerie: This is a game to you? I'm burning, I'm being devoured from the inside. Pain, pain is tearing me apart. (*Deep voice frightens and slowly disappears*) I'll take anything. (*she angrily throws the chair aside*)

(*She falls to her hands and knees at the center of the stage*)

Valerie: I'm losing... I'm losing my mind. (*she hits her head*) Get out! Let me be! ... Where am I? Who am I?

Psychiatrist (voice): How do you feel?

Valerie (*starts to crawl towards the front edge of the stage, Dva reza appears*): My body's failing... (*she stops, looks towards the audience and says*) Now can you see the pain? (*she puts her finger to her lips*) Shhh... They're sleeping.

Psychiatrist (voice): Who is?

Valerie: The demons in my head.

Tomorrow, I'm sure, they'll start again.

When will it finally end?

The roses in my garden

Are weak and have no smell

Even when the sun comes

I'm still walking through hell

Don't be fooled, they said,

They always come back

„Who ?“, I asked,

The demons in your head, they said (pauses a bit)

The demons in your head, they said

(Dva reza disappears and a part of Damir Urban's song Ruke is performed)



Psychiatrist (voice): Take my hand!

Valerie: Your hand. My God, I lost control.

Psychiatrist (voice): And showed pain.

Valerie: What now? *(confused but calm, surprised)*

Psychiatrist (voice): I see your pain is extremely severe. It's good that you showed your pain and that you came here today and opened up about this immense chapter of your life. It was captured inside of you, in your body and your mind, unshared.

Valerie: Strange, I feel a bit better now...I was always afraid to talk about it, I invested so much energy into hiding it, staying in unbearable silence.

Psychiatrist (voice): Silent screams!

Valerie: It appears so. But now I screamed aloud...

Cue music – L. Beethoven – Sonata 25, op 79, Andante

FINE.