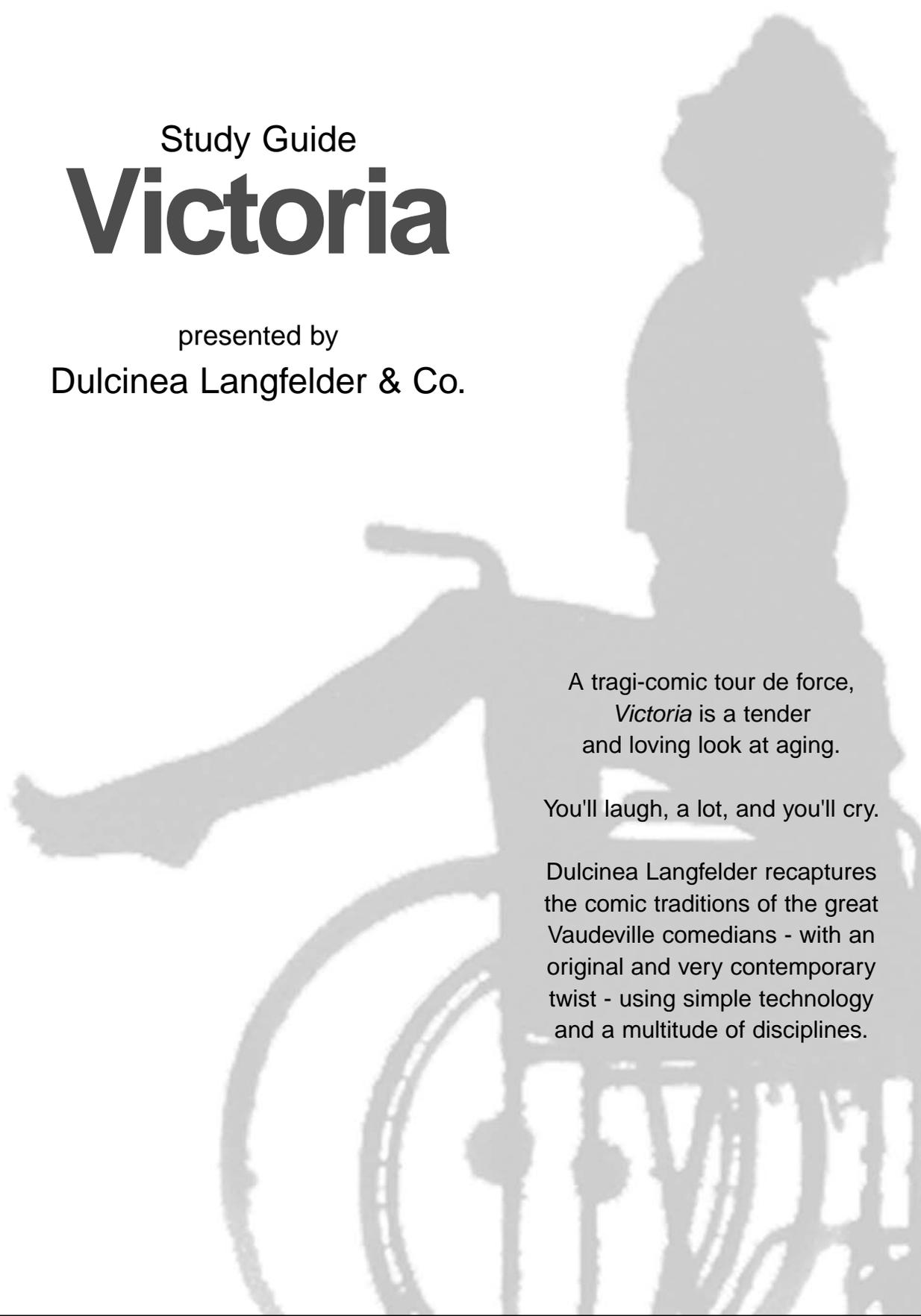


Study Guide

Victoria

presented by
Dulcinea Langfelder & Co.



A tragi-comic tour de force,
Victoria is a tender
and loving look at aging.

You'll laugh, a lot, and you'll cry.

Dulcinea Langfelder recaptures
the comic traditions of the great
Vaudeville comedians - with an
original and very contemporary
twist - using simple technology
and a multitude of disciplines.



A message from the artistic director of
Dulcinea Langfelder & Co.
about

Victoria

Imagine accepting that each moment is a chance to start over. Imagine being unhindered by memory. Imagine not being able to think, but only to imagine. It would be a bit like dreaming. And what is it that counts in our dreams?

What can we take with us when we die?

It's something that aging, and even dementia can't take away.

It's the moments of communion that we have known, with creatures, gardens and gods... otherwise known as love.

Our heroine, Victoria, has lost her memory; she's lost her pussycat, she's lost control over her life... and her bladder. She has lost almost everything. Victoria is but a shadow of herself; a character who's forgotten her role, a puppet who adapts and adopts comic and dramatic situations as her imagination dictates. Her wheelchair is also her rocking chair, her prison, her tango partner and her flying chariot.

Living isn't easy and neither is dying, but it is all interlaced with moments of great richness... little victories. Victoria savors every moment. I was glad to find a bit of myself in her - I hope that you will, too.

Dulcinea Langfelder

Credits

Victoria is a multidisciplinary creation involving many minds.

Based on an original idea and texts by Charles Fariala.

Staged and performed by Dulcinea Langfelder in collaboration with the following artists:

The Orderly: Éric Gingras, Martin Rouleau or Yves Simard,
(role created by Réal Bossé)

Set and Lighting Design: Ana Cappelluto,

Electroacoustic Compositions: Christian Calon

Videos: Yves Labelle,

Consultant for staging of videos: Jimmy Lakatos,

Directorial Coaching: Maryse Pigeon, Erika Batdorf and Diane Dubeau

What? You've never heard of Dulcinea Langfelder?

She's never won a Pulitzer, but Dulcinea has been around. She's an important member of Montreal's effervescent cultural scene. She's a New Yorker who speaks (almost) perfect French, a dancer who sings and makes you laugh, an actress who dances and moves you to tears.

She studied dance for much of her life in New York, then mime with the master, Étienne Decroux, in Paris. She has studied theatre with Eugenio Barba and Yoshi Oida (long time colleague of Peter Brook). She came to Montreal in 1978 to work with the troupe, Omnibus, then briefly with Carbone 14.



She founded her company in 1985, and has created full length, multidisciplinary works that have toured extensively in four continents. ***Vicious Circle*** (1985), ***The Lady Next Door*** (1989), ***Hockey! O.K.?*** (1991), ***Portrait of a Woman with Suitcase*** (1994) and ***Victoria*** (1999) are her major works. ***Quand le Vautour Danse*** (1997) written by Abia Farhoud, was a coproduction with Le Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui in Montreal.

Enjoying her artistic liberty, she works in theatre, in cinema, in music and in musical theatre as choreographer and/or actress. Her versatility and her inspired performances garnered her the «Personality of the Year in Dance», an honor given by the Montreal daily, La Presse, in 1990.

The praise she receives centers on the thread that intertwines all of her work and makes it unique; an inspiration driven by an extensive search for lightness as a reaction to the weight of living. Using lightness, she is continually searching for a level of perception in which we find the courage to confront the tragi-comical reality of the human condition.

Artistic approach:

“Everyone asks me to define what I do in terms of a discipline, everyone except my audience. During a performance, it becomes obvious.

The human imagination does not categorize - the proof is in the dreaming! We don't have 'speaking' dreams, 'musical' dreams or 'movement' dreams. We don't have 'traditional' dreams or 'experimental' dreams. When we dream, we mix everything up.

What I do on stage simply reflects the normal functioning of the imagination. Imagery is not just pictures. Imagery speaks to us on a level which goes deeper than language and culture. It concerns all of our senses, since imagery is suggestive, and provokes our sense memory.

I struggle to find a balance between the concrete and the abstract, the banal and the poetic, and I am convinced that one can be real on stage without being realistic. I need my entire body (including my vocal chords) to do it, and I need strong collaborators, in order to make sure that the audience is far too enthralled to notice the complexity behind the simplicity of the imagery they experience.”

Dulcinea Langfelder

You are about to meet Victoria face to face ... so you'd better be prepared! She may be small, frail and rather adorable, but she can be *very scary!* Well, she likes to think so. And for Victoria, whatever she chooses to think becomes her reality. Victoria's brain is not what it used to be. In some ways, it doesn't work anymore, but in other ways, it's better than it was.

This study guide should be referred to before and after seeing the performance.

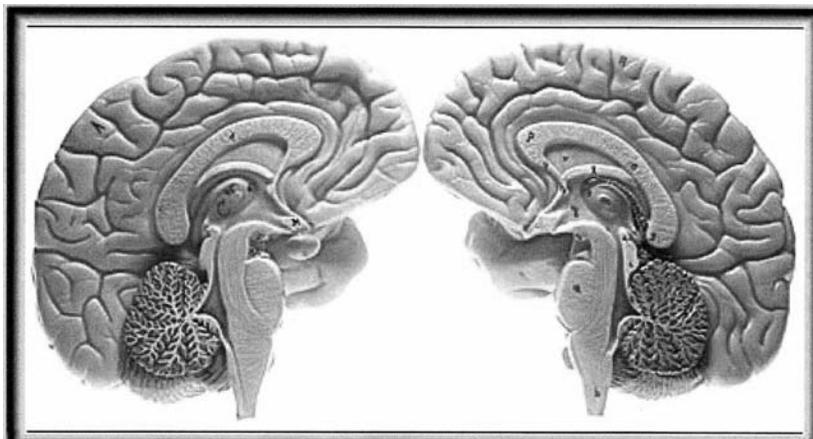
Here is some of the research that went into this work:

What is THE HUMAN BRAIN ???

Humankind is only beginning to understand this most complicated part of our bodies, which (we do know) determines how every other part of our bodies function, and why we behave the way we do. We have given names to sections of this amazing ball we carry around, and are constantly trying to better understand which parts of the brain control which functions, and how they work together.

The human brain is made up of billions of *neurons*. Each has a cell body, an *axon*, and many *dendrites*. The cell body contains a nucleus, which controls all of the cell's activities, and several other structures that perform specific functions. The axon, which is much, much narrower than the width of a human hair, extends out from the cell body and transmits messages to other neurons. Sometimes, the messages have to travel over very long distances (even up to 5 feet!). Each nerve cell is connected to thousands of other nerve cells through its axon and dendrites.

Groups of neurons in the brain have specific jobs. Some are involved with thinking, learning and memory. Others are responsible for receiving sensory information. Still others communicate with muscles, stimulating them into action.



Most of the brain is divided into two hemispheres, right and left. They are connected by a thick bundle of nerves called the *Corpus Callosum*. The two hemispheres differ in what they focus on and how they process information. The left hemisphere appears to focus on the details (such as recognizing a face in a crowd). This part of the brain perceives the linear: numbers and letters, for example. It is associated with rational thinking. The right hemisphere focuses on the broad background (such as understanding the relative position of objects in a space). It perceives imagery: the whole picture, impressions, music. It is associated with intuitive thinking.



Which side of your brain is dominant?

There are no wrong answers to this quiz (unless your answer isn't true!) Answer honestly, and afterwards, use the key to calculate which side of your brain is dominant. Everyone uses both sides of the brain – but probably not equally. Knowing which side of your brain is dominant can help you better understand yourself.

1. When you walk into a theater, classroom, or auditorium (and assuming that there are no other influential factors), which side do you prefer?

- a) right
- b) left

2. When taking a test, which style of questions do you prefer?

- a) objective (true/false, multiple choice, matching)
- b) subjective (discussion)

3. Do you often have hunches?

- a) yes
- b) no

4. When you have hunches, do you follow them?

- a) yes
- b) no

5. Do you have a place for everything and keep everything in its place?

- a) yes
- b) no

6. When you are learning a dance step, is it easier for you to

- a) learn by imitation the teacher and getting the feel of the music?
- b) learn the sequence of movements and talk your way through the steps?

7. Do you like to move your furniture several times a year, or do you prefer to keep the same arrangement?

- a) keep
- b) move

8. Can you tell approximately how much time passed without a watch?

- a) yes
- b) no

9. Speaking in strictly relative terms, is it easier for you to understand

- a) algebra?
- b) geometry?

10. Is it easier for you to remember people's names or people's faces?
- a) names
b) faces
11. When given the topic "school," would you prefer to express your feelings through drawing or writing?
- a) drawing
b) writing
12. When someone is talking to you, do you respond to the word meaning, or do you respond to the person's word pitch and feelings?
- a) word meaning (what is said)
b) word pitch and feeling (how it is said)
13. When speaking, do you use few gestures, or do you use many gestures (that is, do you use your hands when you talk)?
- a) few gestures (very seldom use hands when you talk)
b) many gestures (often use hands when you talk)
14. Your desk or where you work is
- a) neat and organized.
b) cluttered with stuff that you might need.
15. Is it easier for you to read for main ideas or to read for specific details?
- a) main ideas
b) specific details
16. Do you do your best thinking sitting erect or lying down?
- a) sitting erect
b) lying down
17. Do you feel more comfortable saying/doing humorous things or saying/doing well-reasoned things?
- a) humorous things
b) well-reasoned things
18. In math
- a) you can explain how you got the answer.
b) you can get the answer but cannot explain how.

Key to left/right brain dominance quiz

- 1. a – left
b – right
- 2. a – left
b – right
- 3. a – right
b – left
- 4. a – left
b – right
- 5. a – left
b – right
- 6. a - right
b – left
- 7. a – left
b – right
- 8. a – left
b – right
- 9. a – left
b – right
- 10. a – left
b – right
- 11. a – right
b – left
- 12. a – left
b – right
- 13. a – left
b – right
- 14. a – left
b – right
- 15. a – right
b – left
- 16. a – left
b – right
- 17. a – right
b – left
- 18. a – left
b – right

How many right brain traits? _____

How many left brain traits? _____

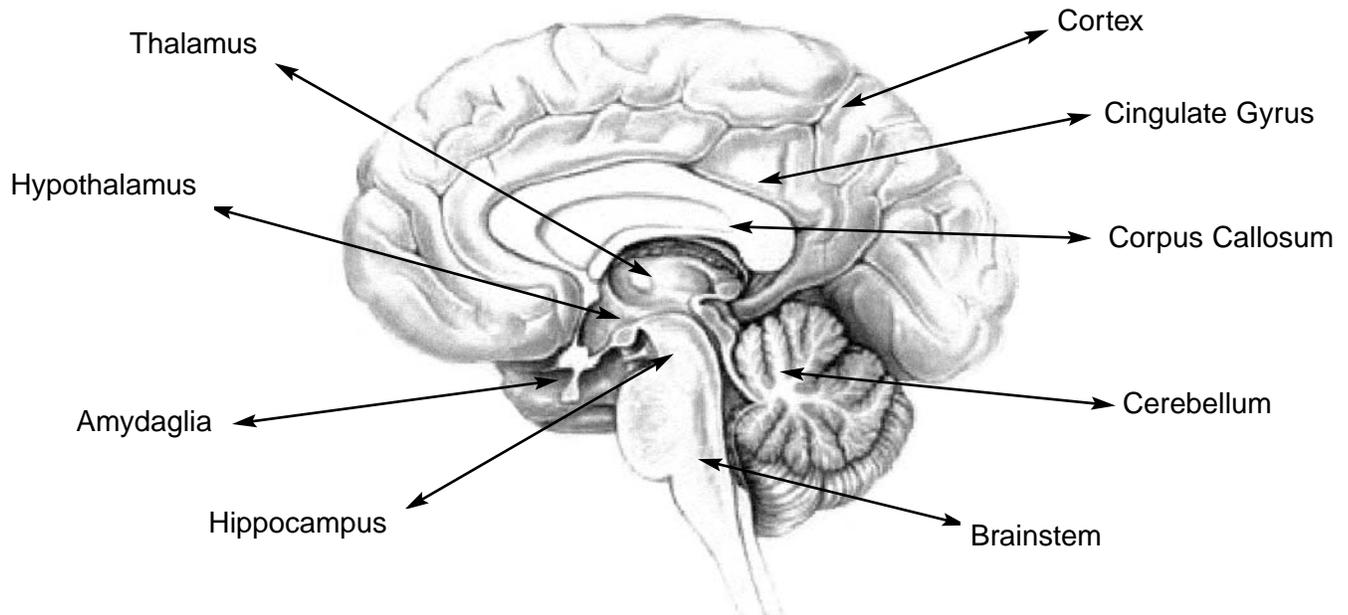
Notes:



Getting back to the Brain ...

The cerebral hemispheres have an outer layer called the *Cerebral Cortex*. This is where the brain processes sensory information received from the outside world, controls voluntary movement, and regulates conscious thought and mental activity.

The *limbic system* links the *Brainstem* with the higher reasoning elements of the Cerebral Cortex. It controls emotions and instinctive behavior, as well as learning and memory. This is also where the sense of smell is located.



The *Cingulate Gyrus* helps the nervous system adjust blood pressure, heart rate, pupil size and other psychosomatic responses to emotional stimuli.

The *Corpus Callosum* is the thick band of fibres that enable the two hemispheres to communicate.

The *Thalamus* receives sensory and limbic information, processes it, and then sends it to the Cerebral Cortex.

The *Hypothalamus* is a structure under the Thalamus that monitors activities like body temperature and food intake. It issues instructions to correct any imbalances. The hypothalamus also controls the body's internal clock.

The *Amygdala* plays a role in learning, in memory, and most of all in emotions - especially fear and aggression. Rats whose amygdalae have been removed will calmly walk into the jaws of a cat.

The *Hippocampus* is important for learning and short-term memory. This part of the brain is considered to be the site where short-term memories are converted into long-term memories for storage in other brain areas.

The *Cerebellum* is found in the back, underneath the hemispheres. It's in charge of balance and coordination. The cerebellum also has two hemispheres. They are always receiving information from the eyes, ears, and muscles and joints about the body's movements and position. Once the cerebellum processes the information, it works through the rest of the brain and spinal cord to send out instructions to the body. The cerebellum's work allows us to walk smoothly, maintain our balance, and turn.

The *Brainstem* sits at the base of the brain. It connects the spinal cord with the rest of the brain. Even though it's the smallest of the three main players, its functions are crucial to survival. The Brainstem controls the functions that happen automatically to keep us alive - our heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing. It also relays information between the brain and the spinal cord, which then sends out messages to the muscles, skin, and other organs. Sleep and dreaming are also controlled by the Brainstem.

What is memory?

It has a lot to do with chemistry. Experiences send nerve impulses traveling along neurons. These impulses jump the gap between neurons - not electrically, but chemically. Chemical substances called *neurotransmitters* released from the end one neuron move across the gap and stimulate an impulse in another neuron. Each time that pathway is used, the neurons become more sensitive, and can stimulate each other more easily in the future. In other words, we get used to reacting in certain ways to certain stimuli.

Short term memories depend on chemicals that disappear almost as quickly as they are made. Remembering a phone number just long enough to make a call is an example of short term memory.

Long term memories require a much more complicated series of chemical changes. Much of this process remains to be discovered (in other words, we're really not at all sure how it works!). This guide wont attempt to describe the various theories. What we do know is that short term memory can be lost a lot more easily than long term memory.

" Memory is never a simple recording or reproduction but an active process of recategorization – of reconstruction, of imagination, determined by our own values and perspectives. "
Gerald M. Edelman (neurologist), as quoted by Oliver Sacks
(author of «Awakenings» and «The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat»)

Memory games:

Our senses and emotions are strongly linked to memory.

- Collect various odors: cotton balls dipped in vanilla, peppermint, eucalyptus or any essential oil. Add particular foods or sweets. Ask your blindfolded test subject to describe the memories and emotions the smells bring to mind.

Try the same test with the auditory sense: choose recordings of music, familiar voices, or sounds from nature.

Or do the same with the sense of touch, using sand, stone, tile, warm water, ice ... etc!

- Test your ability to remember a series of numbers or words. Have a partner present the series to you (orally or in writing) then see how many you can remember in a limited amount of time. If you are like most people, you will do well until asked to remember eight items. Why eight? No one knows!

- Test your memory and see which hemisphere remembers more than the other:

Arrange objects in a room to create an environment, then have your test subject observe the environment for 10 seconds. Then they must close their eyes and describe what they saw in as much detail as possible.

- Finally, try this to see just how hard it is to avoid emotions:

Close your eyes and try to make your face as expressionless as possible - without looking like a zombie. Walk up to a mirror and open your eyes. You're allowed to laugh.

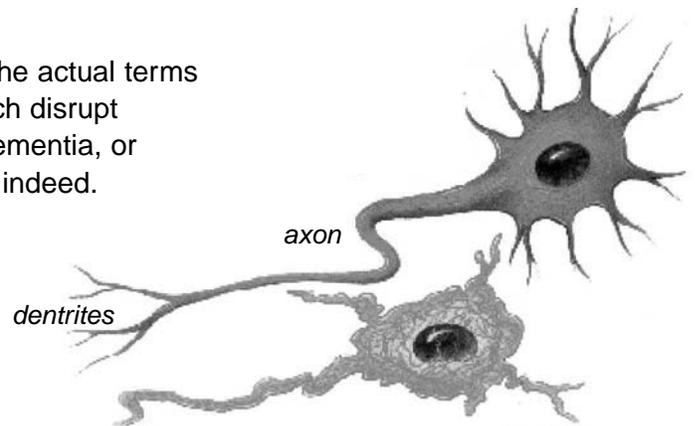
Healthy neuron

The Aging Brain

As a person gets older, the brain can get tangled. The actual terms are “tangles”, “plaques” and “lesions” that form, which disrupt memory function among other things. In cases of dementia, or Alzheimer’s disease, the brain can get very tangled indeed.

Alzheimer’s disease is one of several disorders that cause the gradual loss of brain cells. The disease was first described in 1906 by German physician Dr. Alois Alzheimer.

It seems to mostly affect the left hemisphere of the brain.



Neuron with Neurofibrillary tangles

The character, Victoria, like many real people who were observed, cannot tell you how old she is, but she remembers all the words to her favorite songs. Even when she can’t speak, she can still sing. She probably won’t remember your name, but she knows immediately how you’re feeling, and sometimes even what you’re thinking! The more her rational thinking slips away from her, the more her imagination and her feelings seem to strengthen.

As Victoria says,

« The older I get, the more vividly I remember things that never happened! »



Yes, Victoria is old ... she’s not what she used to be. You could say that she is a shadow of herself. She doesn’t even remember who she is! When she sees her own shadow, she thinks it’s another person.

Is she crazy?
Or just a bit tangled...



and speaking of shadows ...

What is a shadow?

“It’s the negative of you ... I mean, it’s where the light hits you – NO – it’s where you block the light ... I mean ... IT’S VERY SIMPLE! There’s nothing mysterious about it!”

Victoria’s Orderly

Is it so simple?

Humankind has always been fascinated with shadows. It is our first cinema! Have you ever played with shadows on the wall? Can you do the dog?

The shadow is that which opposes the light. It is the image of that which is fleeting, unreal and constantly changing. Shadows are dreamlike, and dreams have influenced our mythology, belief systems and behavior since the beginning of time. Karl Jung (one of the ‘fathers’ of modern psychology) used the shadow as a symbol of our darker side – the one we must confront at various moments in our lives, usually through our dreams. He made a study of his many patients’ dreams, and discovered that often people dreamed of characters and situations that resembled ancient myths and legends from all over the world ... that his patients had never learned about! How did they know to dream about these «archetypes» as Jung called them? Jung called it «the collective unconscious» - also known as our «collective memory». We never lose *this* type of memory.

- The shadow is the manifestation of our subtle essence – our spirit – which is at the core of Indonesian shadow puppetry.
- In some South American dialects, the same word means shadow, image and soul.
- For many African tribes, the shadow is our “second nature” – it is linked with death. “In the land of death, one is nourished only by shadows.” (Negritos Semang)
- The Sufi poet, Rûzbahân, wrote, “The greatest human beauty is a shadow – she brings night into day and day into night” (Koran 3,25)
- The shadow is yin, (feminine) as opposed to light, which is yang (masculine) in Chinese philosophy.
- Also according to Chinese philosophy, the noon hour, when the sun is directly above and casts no shadow – as though our shadow was integrated within us – is the moment of inner peace.
- Some psychologists use the image of «eating one’s shadow», meaning ‘digesting’ who we are, for better and worse.

Why does Victoria talk to her shadow? Because people who have dementia don’t recognize themselves in a mirror or in their own shadow. They tend to forget who they are in relation to the outside world. They have moments where, like infants, they don’t perceive themselves as selves, but rather as part of one big universe of space and time.



- **Freya** is the name of the Great Goddess in Nordic mythology. She travels in a chariot pulled by cats.

What to look for in the performance:

- Characterization:

Dulcinea Langfelder's performance is both funny and deeply moving. How do you suppose she developed the character of Victoria? What makes her believable? How does the performer let us know who, what and where she is?

- Word play:

The script is full of clever wordplay and double entendre. You'll want to listen carefully so as not to miss anything. How do Victoria's words give you insight into her situation and her personality?

- Props:

Victoria's wheelchair serves her as a means of expression as well as movement. Watch for the different ways it is used and how it changes in significance.

- Special effects:

Victoria is a multidisciplinary and a multimedia piece which uses a simple but versatile set design and lighting, sound and video to help create Victoria's world. Watch for the additional characters created by the shadow projections, and even the curtains themselves. Who are they? what is their significance to Victoria? How do they help move the 'story' along?

After seeing the performance, here are things you can do:

- Write biographies;

Invent a past for either or each of the two characters. Where are they from? What kind of family? What brought them to where you found them on stage?

- On the following page, you will find a key scene from *Victoria*. It's better not to read it before you see the performance, but if you can't resist, go ahead - it won't make much sense until you've seen it in context. Take this scene and analyze it, in writing or in discussion.

Why is this scene so important?

Why not interpret it yourselves? The hospital gown could be a nightgown or pajamas. The orderly should be dressed in white. If you don't have a wheelchair, use an ordinary chair (don't try to tango with it, though). Use a sheet for a curtain, find a small blanket or towel, some rags - you'll need a diaper and a chocolate box ... and a healthy dose of imagination!

Dulcinea Langfelder welcomes any comments or questions. You can email her at: dulcy@videotron.ca



Cleaning the mess

The orderly enters and sees that Victoria has smeared brown goo all over and pulled a curtain down over her head.

Ord: Holy shit

Vic: Uh oh

Ord: I don't have enough on my plate? You have to serve me this for desert?

Vic: Where are we?

Ord: Up shit's creek! And I wonder what the hell I'm doing here!

Vic: Oh I'm sure someone will explain

Ord: *He takes off her gown and diaper, throwing them into a receptacle.* You spend your day feeding them and then mopping up the poop ,, then feeding them again, and mopping up the poop – and around and around we go ! Useless waste of time . It's useless, I'm useless ! Nothing but a useless mopper of muck !

He's undressed her and taken off her dirty diaper, and put a cover around her

Vic: Oh, it's chilly out !

Ord: We should just kill them all for merci's sake !

Vic: I agree – in the evening, when they bite, it's murder ! ... Where are we?

Ord: In a hospital, Victoria.

Vic: No ...

Ord: Yes !

Vic: Oh, you poor thing ...

Ord: *Cleaning the chocolate on the floor* And the only reason we're keeping you alive is so that when you finally croak they can cut up your brain to find out why you were so crazy ... with a little luck, find a half decent organ or two ... so at least you'll have some use when you'll die ...

Vic: You'll die?

Ord: I'M not gonna die, YOU'RE gonna ... *pause* ... you didn't understand what I said, did you?

Vic: We're in the same class, han? You and me?

Ord: Good. ... same class ... that's right ... what grade?

Vic: Fifth grade !

Ord: Fifth grade?

Vic: Fifth grade !

Ord: Sure - why not?

Vic: What do say we go for a spin? Han? Skip to the loo if you know what I mean?

Ord: Let's go clean you up, you crazy old crone... (*she sings*) Say goodnight, Victoria.

Vic: Say goodnight, Victoria.

Sources:

Inspired by a study guide by
Cece Daratany

The Brain from Top to Bottom
www.thebrain.mcgill.ca

Alzheimer Association
www.alz.org

Intellegen Inc.
<http://brain.web-us.com>

The Memory Page
www.premiumhealth.com

Memories in the Making, article by Faith Brynie
from the Secret Life of the Brain Teen guide,
Educational Broadcasting Corp. 2002

The Secret Life of the Brain,
public television program
www.pbs.org

Playing Games with Memory
www.exploratorium.edu

Dulcinea Langfelder
Vincent Santes Gonzalez



Victoria's technical team: Saturnin Goyer, Danys Levasseur et Vincent Santes Gonzalez