
Opening to what is and the Practice of Psychotherapy: a talk given to to C. A. T. Therapists in the Munro Centre, 2012.¹

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It can be exciting and fascinating to open to the myriad possibilities of life, yet this can also feel confusing and overwhelming. In order to manage this tension we can succumb to the tendency to attach ourselves to assumptions and habits which allow us to feel competent as we focus on what we know. When we live inside this tunnel-vision, although there is a lot more going on than what we allow ourselves to see, we are often confident that we see the important things clearly. That is to say, what we take to be meaningful in itself is usually that which is meaningful to us.

Groups and institutions also frequently exhibit this tendency. At the beginning, new organisations are often open and eager, exploring many different possibilities and pathways, yet they gradually ossify. This ossification often occurs as a reaction to the danger of entropy. Hard, bony rule-bound structures are developed as a means to maintain what is known. When the options are reduced to choosing between unsettling chaos and deadening order, the space for dynamic responsive creativity is lost.

Since therapists work to enliven others, an important aspect of our task is to try to maintain our sense of freedom, flexibility and playfulness in whatever we do. In fact this is the heart of the work, for the damage that many of our patients have experienced has arisen from a lack of playfulness early in their life. The people around them were too serious – serious in their pre-occupations and serious in their need to control. Tensions in the family system soak up the time and attention which children need in order to ripen well. They are then likely to experience being invaded by rules and demands and abandoned in terms of

¹ ¹ This paper makes reference to Cognitive Analytic Therapy. For details of this see articles, *Cognitive Analytic Therapy* (Anthony Ryle and James Low 1993) and *Cognitive Analytic Therapy* (James Low 2006) which are available on the website: www.simplybeing.co.uk

attuned attention to their intrinsic value. This disturbed and disturbing matrix knocks the children off balance so that they bang into other people who then defend themselves against those they see as unreasonable, and this leads to further cycles of invasion and abandonment. With this, the experience of the free-flow of mutually affirming interaction becomes less and less familiar. When this has been the case, one of our possibilities is to try to tease out the traces of fertile unformedness lying dormant. They may be located in some happy memories of early childhood, of being with grandparents or on a holiday, or they may be evoked by recalling movies that they've seen or a novel that they are currently reading or some incident that they saw in the street. We are trying to catch the unsmoothed edges of experience, the freshness that has not been altered by incorporation into a narrative or dulled by self-serving interpretation.

It is usual for small babies to have a lot of light in their eyes. Seeing this we get a sense of their enthusiasm and openness and availability. Yet after a short time, even by the age of five, veils of various kinds come to hover over their gaze. Some kind of early cataract arrives and the world becomes more opaque and with that opacity people start to fall asleep in the dreams of assumption, prediction and complacency. These predictive structures are dialogic in form, that is to say the person acts with an expectation of how the other is likely to respond. Simple immediacy starts to fade, being replaced by hesitancy, watchfulness and a sense of the need to 'get it right'. Whether the complementary patterns are controlling to controlled, judging to judged, or any other of our dyadic-positionings, there is the paralleling of limitation for each party. The active proponent and the adaptive recipient are both manifesting very restricted aspects of their potential. In the precise specificity of each interaction there is a forgetfulness of the bright, fresh openness which is the first nature of all sentient beings. With the lock-on of these complimentary positioning, there is a decontextualising enclosure in what appears to be the givenness of the situation. The original power imbalance which installed these perverse yet familiar structures is now forgotten and both parties enter these 'reciprocal roles' (R-R) as if either could elicit the reciprocating over-determined response of the other. The choreographer has merged into the choreography to which both parties succumb. The intensity of this event hides the rest of the field as what is figural seems self-existing and separate from all else that has become background.

Reciprocal roles are the structures of our dreams of order, the subtle violence of attempting to ensure that the emergent world conforms to our fantasies. For example, the very commonly identified structure of controlling to controlled is clearly a fantasy, for there is not much that we can control in life. Yet encapsulation within that fantasy keeps us striving to control situations which are full of incalculable variables. When you're a little kid, you have to learn how to get the spoon up to your mouth without pouring the food down your front and that requires quite a bit of practice. But once you've got the basic sensory motor-functions under control you are free to concentrate on the central function of life, namely, to play. Until you become coherent, until intention, mobilisation and attention to the unfolding situation arise together, you can't play. If you try throwing a ball to someone aged two it is unlikely that they will be able to catch it. Yet by the time they are four, they are there, present and focusing and able to catch. Now synchronised movement and freedom to respond operate together. However when we are considering adult behaviour in terms of dialogic structures such as the reciprocal roles of controlling/controlled, the question of freedom and play is usually far from our minds. The givenness of the validity of these positions is taken for granted. The need to manage ourselves in role, to conform, to fit in, to be useful, blinds us to the foreclosure embedded in these dialogic structures. That the controlling position involves an essential lack of freedom, and that the same applies of course to the controlled position, seems obvious and just a fact of life for the lack of freedom is hidden by the seeming gain of clarity, potency and belonging.

To operate as a functioning adult is to accept the loss of freedom and play, to be inured to the necessity for alignment with the rules of the game – a game which is far from the spirit of free-play. Instead of resting in the fresh openness of being one is constrained by the need to define and maintain identity. As long as core identity is taken to be performative, established in the moment of its enactment, then the transient states of controlled or controlling become the whole world, the whole of oneself for that moment.

This is the experience of the unfree. They, that is to say we, are not imprisoned by an external force but rather, as in a horror movie, they are the undead; they're not dead, they're not alive, but are zombies in limbo-land operating with a pseudo-autonomy, the agency that is scripted by the positions they have

assumed. In this zombie territory a rule-based game has been installed that is the opposite of free play. Each time we participate in the game we get an affirmation; even if we are down at the bottom being controlled there is a containing compactedness in the sense that I know where I am and who I am and I know what the rules of this game are. For example, children who are bullied at school often don't complain because they become inured to their situation, it becomes part and parcel of their repertoire of responses, and in its seeming 'givenness' it feels as if there is nothing that can change it.

So our question has to be, why would someone choose or agree to become unfree? Clearly for children this is partly because they encounter huge differences in power. Adults frequently impose patterns on children which force them away from freedom and spontaneity and responsiveness into an alignment with pre-formed patterns of interaction. But why are these patterns maintained over time? Not everyone we meet confirms our patterns and yet we haven't managed to step out of the patterns which limit us. Why would we not struggle to wake up if freedom is perhaps more tasty and perhaps more authentically human than habitual enslavement within the patterns we are inured to? We might hypothesise that we each have experienced moments of freedom and still have access to a basic potential for freedom which allows us to move towards the world with fresh eyes and to receive the world as it is.

This is our first nature which is both integrated as part of the world and is able to integrate whatever occurs without splitting. Splitting occurs as a consequence of reification and its attendant alienation. Ungrounded and dispossessed we develop all our myriad second-order adaptations. Our first immediate experience of an event is rarely directly experienced as adults, for our second nature, our adaptive strategies and habitual interpretations, have come to seem more like us, more truly who we are, than our first nature. The qualities of trust, creativity, connection, responsiveness are then ascribed to 'secure attachment' and are seen as rare experiences arising from privileged conditions rather than as the flowering of a potential which continues to be present in all. Forgetfulness of the hope embedded in this potential leaves us with very limited horizons for ourselves and in our work with others. The tendency is to focus on moving from 'maladaptive' to 'adaptive' procedures – but this is just another form of the lineages of limited availability which blight childhood and adulthood for so many. The dialogic view is that we are constituted out of our interactions, forming ourselves as relatively stable sites, voices, states, roles, patterns of identity, which become the proactive and reactive bases of interaction with others. With this view we have nowhere else to stand, for we are both wedded to and created by these patterns.

However, we might be helped here by recalling moments of opening in our own lives, moments when we have felt more alive, fresh, more fully ourselves and fully part of what is occurring. These moments are reminders of our first nature – they are neither dialogic nor mediated by patterns, habits and concepts. They are moments of being, being ourselves as field phenomena, being as it emerges as participation in the ever-changing field of experience. Our 'becoming' may well be dialogic, but our *being* is not.

The dialogic veils the phenomenological; the conceptual, sign-based dialogic, operates in/as the reified dualistic frame – a frame of making sense of, and simultaneously creating and appropriating, 'what is occurring'. The actual is immediate – it shows itself – but only to the receptive spaciousness which is relaxed enough to avoid becoming entrained in the busyness of working out what is going on. Our first nature is precisely this awareness, this presence that is open and available, neither pre-occupied nor foreclosed. Some taste or hint of it is present in the very young, but their capacity to integrate is all too easily constrained and muted. The sense of 'me' is always at risk of a troubling impact from the flickering field of all that is 'not me'.

The paradox of our situation is that in our impulsive abandonment into a self-state where a fragment is momentarily all there is of us, our open availability is functioning there only as the basis of our identification with the limited. Due to the instability embedded in our sense of lack, loss and need, the open hospitality of presence manifests in its limited guise of the chameleon-like capacity to open to, to be suffused by, and merged with, whatever transient experience our longing for identity is able to cleave to. The loss of direct experience of presence has us wandering on the wild seas of becoming, thereby making us prone to the happenstance of 'any port in a storm'. Even when we try to extricate ourselves from this impulsive reactive volatility by operating in the mode of observing, thinking about, reflecting on, using a

map, seeing what one is up to etc. etc. , the space of experience is now being filled with concepts, agendas, intentions and so the basic availability of our first nature continues to be obscured.

However, with our remembrance of moments of simplicity we might just trust that open availability could be enough. Then, resting in this non-conceptual direct presence we are there with whatever is occurring, neither merged in it nor apart from it. This experience reveals our non-conceptual clarity, rich in intrinsic value, immediate satisfaction, contentment and fullness. With present awareness free of the need for more, or for adaptation or improvement or appropriation, all our potential and resources are freed from their defensive duties and are available for optimal responsive participation.

Our sense of being an individual self, whether largely coherent or largely incoherent, is itself a field phenomena. It is an unfolding of busy interactions and as such is truly dialogic. Yet prior to this movement, and underpinning it, there is the presence of the experiencer, an awareness which is not constituted out of emergent factors but is the givenness of our being. It is forgetfulness of this open presence which is the root of neurosis and psychosis. Huge anxiety for the child arises when they encounter the enforcement of alignment with rules and systems which have no immediate significance for them. Survival comes to be dependent on fitting in, on doing, and indeed appearing to be, what is required by those who have power, by those who enforce patterning in order to remove their own anxiety. For those who have come to rely on a sense of the givenness, the 'naturalness' of their own positions (the solipsistic 'I am who I take myself to be'), the openness of the emergent field of experience is terrifying. It brings a return to the infinite possibility of undetermined participation – what is called 'groundlessness' in existential thought. This has echoes of the 'emergent self' described by Daniel Stern, a non-conceptual presence which has no reference points from which to fabricate a sense of stable identity. This openness requires trust in one's own unfolding and connectivity within an emergent field which is basically collaborative. When this is lost sight of we are abandoned to the sterility of the reiteration of patterns that confirm our sense of having secured the territory, of knowing what is what. Any threat to this order must be dealt with promptly by coercing the other into alignment with our choreography, our map and plan of the moves that alone are deemed valid if our world as we know it is to continue.

Change is challenging for we never know what its limit will be. If we could be sure that only the aspects we want to change would change, then that would be OK but actually the whole field of experience is unstable and liable to shift into new, unexpected patterns which, in turn, will endure for only a short while. Due to this fact we often long for situations that we can take for granted. If we are lucky, when we are young we can take Mum for granted, for she is always there, mainly reliable, attuned and caring. When this secure base is not the case we have to find something else to cling to, and habitual procedures are often recruited to perform this function. The more we find that the people around us are not available as flexible, responsive human beings, the more we protect ourselves by splitting and projection, by seeking to establish a fabricated image of the other which can be held on to as something reliable, good and basically on our side. Maintaining such a comforting delusion requires a lot of effort as new events challenge its validity. On the other hand, if the actual others involved are truly unpredictable and hurtful then accepting the certainty that they are so allows the development of accurate perception which, though frightening, is at least free of the unsettling vagaries of fantasy and hope. The reliance on fixed images of the other, with corresponding fixed images of oneself, leads to dependence on rigid, intense states and procedures as stabilising factors for one's own identity and the shape of one's world. Their reiteration generates a sense of continuity and predictability, yet at a terrible cost, since this deluding simplicity exiles us from the actual complexity of attuned human interaction.

The limited intense moves of people identified as 'having Borderline Personality Disorder' are the consequence of having been hurt and harmed. They were hurt by having been blocked in their childhood search for what they needed and having been coerced into becoming what was actually a violence to their own potential. And they were harmed by not being seen as they were. When a child is dependent on an adult who has no true interest in them, who sees them only as mouldable extensions of themselves, then this foreclosure and pre-occupation blights the child's sense of themselves. The spontaneity of being, as it encounters a world of myriad possibilities, is blocked and crushed and falls into desuetude, vanishing into the shadows. In order to survive the child then adopts the same strategies as its parents, continuing the perverse lineage of constructing an unstable sense of self based on intense self-states, reciprocal roles and

procedures. These are the severed limbs of the sacrificed child, as the openness of being is frozen and then fragmented. The pieces are then stitched together as an unholy construct, a Frankenstein-like creation that is forever aware of not being all there, not being quite right, not being at home in itself.

The intrinsic freedom and spontaneity of being is lost sight of and is replaced by the delinquent pseudo-freedom of impulsive state-shifts, sudden flips which install onerociprocal role after another. Reactivity feeds impulsivity and vice versa and the resulting busyness leaves no space to enquire into what is going on. In seeking freedom from all that is not liked there is rejecting and abandoning and in seeking the freedom to possess all that is liked there is invasion, domination and usurpation of the other. This pseudo-freedom is inseparable from forgetfulness of the ground of actual freedom. Dialogically maintained, its self-referential focus manipulates others in a series of attempts to make them into the desired object. But no such 'object' can fill the lack, the longing that is not of or for something, but rather is the yearning for the peace and ease of being at home in oneself.

In the light of this what is the scope of therapy? What are we seeking to do? Shall we try to bring some degree of clarity through accurate description so that roadblocks can be removed? Or can we also reawaken and revitalise the sense of being? The patient is living within their habitual assumptions and behaviour. These are the lenses and veils through which they experience the world. Their repertoire of dialogic moves establishes the pattern and rules of their game. This is what the therapist encounters. Hopefully the therapist has a good sense of states, roles and procedures – a sense gained not only from books and from their experience of patients, but from their own therapy. The therapist needs to be mindful of the operation of these tendencies in themselves and in the patient, and to encounter them with calm interest, honesty and a clear sense of the danger of their insidious seductive power. The therapist needs to monitor their own tendency to close down the conversation by wanting to install a familiar set move as a defence against the perhaps uncomfortable feeling of not quite knowing what to say.

As reasonably functioning adults, most of the time, we probably know what to say. Of course if a close friend tells you that their Mum has just died, or if a colleague says, 'I had an abortion last week', it might well be difficult to know how to respond. However, in most areas of life we have a sense of the rules of the game and so have a sense of what to say. Somebody tells us that they are having difficulties with their boss at work and we get in there and offer our opinions about what might be done. The range of our potential responses quickly and sensitively attunes to this precise situation, helping us to feel that we are making some degree of contact with the other person. Of course, this attunement operates as a subtle reinforcement of the patterns and procedures of ourselves and our patients. This can lead us to take them as 'givens' so that we feel truthful to the event, even as we are being constrained and directed by habitual choreography.

When we meet very disturbed people, it can in a way be like meeting a newly bereaved person. Our usual words seem bland and insufficient. Situations, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, sensations are being described which are unusual. We can read this as an indication that they are abnormal, yet their account is meaningful for them. So we have a choice, do we enter their world or do we try to pull them into ours?

If we truly move towards the patient's world then they become the expert and we don't. However, when the other person makes me feel inadequate because I don't understand them, then it can feel very tempting to retreat into the castle of specialist knowledge. With this defended and inflated position I am also empowered to shrink the other person by identifying them as 'a patient' whose 'condition' is classifiable within my expert schema. I'm not going to give them the power to disturb me, because I am going to be ahead of the game since I can get their number and define their diagnosis even if it doesn't quite fit all the facts. Instead of meeting them person-to-person, with all the not-knowing that this entails, we install a frame in which there is a knower and a known; and as the therapist, we install ourselves as the unknowable knower. Even if we try to move towards the other with open-hearted responsiveness, we bring some sense of structuring what is occurring, for we always have an agenda, a map, a way of making sense of what is going on. We therapists need our own therapy, not just to recognise our own neurotic biases and patterns but to support our on-going enquiry into the beliefs and almost invisible assumptions that we employ in our efforts to structure and make sense of what is occurring. We take so much for granted. We rely on the

seeming truth of so many concepts about human existence and about our own place in the world. Perhaps we can't escape our reliance on beliefs – but we might be able to stop taking them to be facts!

The ground on which we stand – our sense of how things are – is a construct, a historically, situationally generated belief system. Being open to such an understanding allows us to relax into the spaciousness of the moment, thereby allowing our limitations to reveal themselves and be acknowledged, without us identifying with them or indulging in them. This is different from a phenomenological analysis which, in attempting to see things as they are in themselves without interpretation, would strip away assumptions and thereby edit out the actual lived complexity of the interaction. Moreover the problem with trying to strip away assumptions and impediments is that first we have to identify them as such. We can only strip away the obscurations that we can actually identify as obscuring, and the problem with our obscurations is that they are usually invisible to us!

This brings us to the question of whether psychotherapy is an intentional practice. Are we trying to achieve something? And if so, what is it? Perhaps we want to cure people of whatever it is that ails them, to help them to be happier and more fulfilled. These would seem to be reasonable and ethical goals. But are there methods that can be learned which will certainly bring a realisation of these goals? If not, then what is the point of all the study, the reading, the reflecting and the writing required to become a psychotherapist? Surely we have been learning how to do something. No doubt – but what is it that we are to do?

Two paths open up here. The first is the sense that we have been learning useful techniques and skills which we can apply. These include formulation, interpretation, empathic attunement, building a working alliance, dream analysis, identifying patterns of behaviour such as traps, reciprocal-roles, self-states. . . There are so many ways of thinking and responding which we can learn. The second path is quite different for it is a *via negativa* which entails tolerating the falling away of that which is already known and resisting the urge to accumulate new knowledge as a compensation for the loss. This is negative capability, defined by Keats as “. . . when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason”.² To not know means to not rely on knowledge as the framer of one's experience. It means to be with experience without being anyone in particular. This may sound impossible or ridiculous, for surely we are always someone somewhere? Well, that is true. Yet, when we observe the 'someone' as we transit the many 'somewheres' of our lives we find that we change with our changing situation. What we take to be I, me, myself are more like glass jars, empty in themselves, translucent yet ceaselessly filling and emptying with fleeting contents that are opaque and are taken to be substantial and definitive. So, if this is the case – and I would suggest that we can all find it to be so by carefully attending to the actuality of our existence – then we are more reliably identified as the space of experience rather than its temporary 'content'. The experiencer is always open. By letting go of our anxious fusion with the momentary patternings of the flow of experience, the experiencer is revealed as the ground, the source and the field of experience and this, I would suggest, is the optimal 'basis' for psychotherapy.

Open spacious presence has no agenda, no intention and is thereby not in opposition to anything the 'patient' brings. Patterns are held in place by repetition and confirmation. Spacious acceptance shows the operation of these tendencies without confirming them as something existing in truth. This itself is the path to freedom which is not a path.

In relation to these two paths – the path of intentional activity and the path of releasing and relaxing – we have to consider the two common tendencies of invasion and abandonment. Is it invading to tell a child what to do so that they will fit in with their cultural environment? Is it abandoning not to do so? How to find a reasonable balance? Well, perhaps not by relying on a sense of the reasonable. In order to establish what is 'reasonable' we have to extricate ourselves from the lived moment, the moment of presence and contact. Then we have to rely on concepts extrapolated from other contexts and use them to construct a 'reading' of the situation. But of course 'thinking about' is not the same as 'being with', and the moment, the actual situatedness, has been replaced by an image, a representation. This is the realm of overview, planning and control, and it is unlikely to find the fulcrum point of invasion/abandonment since it is itself a manifestation of both tendencies.

² Keats, J. (1970) *The Letters of John Keats: a selection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (p142)

Freedom to act ethically and spontaneously may well be grounded in freedom from reliance on concepts as the guarantor of validity. The ontological insecurity that drives dependence on cognition, on the endless task of making sense of what is going on, is not an inevitable aspect of givenness. Although we experience the 'thrown-ness' and 'groundlessness' pointed to by the existentialists this indeed is itself mere transient experience. There is a groundless ground beneath and permeating the groundlessness of the anxious ego, the decontextualised self.

Well, if this is so, how are we to contact it? By letting go of technique, agency, the will to power, thoughtful intentionality, and all the other factors which seem so helpful and necessary. The paradox is that if we let go of all 'our' supports we will find that we are still here, vital and present, and without need of support. Without this direct experience it is perhaps unlikely that we will be able to facilitate others in being free. Techniques help us go from A to B but not to be present with the ground of A, the ground of B. This ground is our open presence itself, the intrinsic clarity of awareness, of our mind itself. This is the fundamental ontological security – a security not based on attachment experiences, or belief systems or conceptual elaboration and analysis. This is the open basis for impartial hospitality required for psychotherapy that facilitates true integration of being and being in the world with others.

This seems to be very different from employing a model of therapy as a means of shifting a person who is defined by certain patterns of behaviour. However, with the spaciousness of ontological security any kind of intervention is possible for it is now clear that the stuck patterns are not the totality of the person or of their potential. Aspects of models can be made use of but one is free of the logic that directs and governs them. With the unconditional acceptance of the other which arises from seeing their spaciousness and potential, the limiting factors that seemed to define them are starved of the oxygen of attention and collusive belief. The interventions of the therapist are operating within a joint system, a co-emergent field, and serve to illuminate that field and facilitate the other awakening where they are to where they are. This is the space that hosts the infinite conversation, the never ending interplay of de-reified intersubjectivity.

Of course this requires trust on all sides, trust in the unmanaged ground and in its uncompromised potential. With this basic trust comes inspiration – the felt sense that it is safe to breathe in the world. Then the intercourse of field factors becomes fecund and new forms manifest to be used, enjoyed and let go of. Trusting spaciousness and the inexhaustible creativity of the source, there is no need to try to hold on to transient forms nor try to coax them into being a reliable refuge, a stable host for one's longing for identity. The limited and limiting choreography of reciprocal roles such as controlling/controlled, abandoning/abandoned are markers for the dead-end of repetition, the game of 'I'll help you be who you are if you help me be who I am'. Recognising that it is a game could be the basis for an open enquiry that would put all certainties into play. But unfortunately, ontological insecurity has us grasping at patterns as if they were substantial and so we tend to help the other to be who they are by eliciting their habitual positionings and procedures. In order to survive in the family matrix the baby has to learn to adapt, to align themselves with a system of tendencies and avoidances that were in place even before they were conceived. Fitting in with the dominant reciprocal roles reduces manifest conflict – you adapt and thereby save yourself, but in the very process of saving yourself, you harm and lose yourself.

This develops as a narrative of having being hurt, harmed, diminished. And this in turn further reifies the sense of self, for 'this really happened to me'. The assertion of ego-identity becomes inseparable from ontological insecurity – and so, finding oneself all at sea in the ceaseless waves of experience one grasps at whatever flotsam and jetsam is available and in DIY fashion cobbles together patterns and procedures which generate a sense of identity.

Having being invaded and abandoned, one is left with a longing for the other to attune to us – but on our terms. It seems impossible then to find freedom within the constraints of social existence because we have adopted the defensive position that 'nobody's going to tell me what to do'. This is a kind of 'freedom from', an assertion that nobody is ever going to have control over me again. Yet it means that the world is experienced as being full of provocations, and if I am hypersensitive to provocations and see them as a direct attack, I am going to be easily excited and exercised by the behaviour of others.

This points to the painful problematic that whenever we try to control the world we become a puppet of events, and hence true freedom is essentially the relinquishing of control. For example, if I want my garden to be just as I design it, this intention does not stop the wind blowing other seeds into the garden. As they sprout and grow I encounter weeds growing in my garden: “Oh no, I must get a hoe!” I dig up all the weeds but a few days later when I go out for a breath of fresh air I find that more weeds have arrived. That is our life isn't it! We get home, we're tired, yet there are messages on the answering machine, there are letters, what is it all about? “This is not what I had planned. Why are you doing this to me?”

The wind is wonderful as an image for the ego, for it manifests as a kind of listlessness; never quite settled, it's always ready to move off in different directions. Neither the ego nor its environment can be controlled. The more you try to control what's occurring, the more you are a puppet of fate, for any new situation that arrives will pull one of your many strings and set you off. You think you're in charge, “I'm going to sort it out!” but you're attempting to sort out something else that has already impacted you. The notion of proactive control is actually an illusion, indeed it's a delusion, because the ego can't escape the state of reactivity. This is true for both the therapist and the patient. So in the very moment that we're standing up for our freedom and autonomy, we are actually enslaving ourselves. Well, this is quite painful to see, isn't it?

So perhaps we need a different vision of freedom, a freedom that would be more tolerant of our instability and vulnerability. A sense of freedom which includes acceptance of responsiveness, of flexibility, of resilience. These are actually qualities that you see in most small babies. To be responsive, flexible and resilient is to rest in our first nature, our potential which is part of the field present prior to all the splitting and adaptations that have induced a forgetfulness of our actuality. When we turn towards this, not as a thought but as a direct awakening, we become able to drop our agendas and start to respond to the actual situation. So if we are trained in a particular model of therapy and are trying to apply certain techniques in order to achieve a 'good' outcome, it is perhaps helpful to reflect on the primacy of relatedness. At birth we emerge into a field of experience that we are already part of. With trauma, with the convolutions of self-concern, there is an isolation of the self, a forgetfulness of relatedness. The therapist forgets this at their own peril and that of their patients.

Whatever the 'model' requires is secondary to the actuality of the non-duality, the co-emergence of the relational field. Many things that we know how to do are useless with particular people, particular patients, in particular situations. These methods and techniques may be 'good' in themselves – like many medicines – but they have to be valid in the concrete situation if they are to be useful. If they are imposed on the basis of their 'intrinsic rightness' then the corollary is the 'wrongness' of the other who is seen as being not 'ripe' or not 'ready' to make use of this wonderful gift. This attitude is a violence to the actuality of the situation for it seeks to import and impose an entity, 'the good intervention', on someone who in their current situation (which is being disregarded) has no use for it. The Otherness of the other is radical and infinite and beyond any model or attempt at knowledge or incorporation. Of course we can know things about the other – but these are things in our head. How the other actually is at this moment we have no access to except, perhaps, by opening ourselves to how they show what they show of themselves.

The task for ourselves is to be open and to stay open however the other is. Of course we would like free play to occur, but we cannot make it happen. When there are blocks to mutuality and easy responsiveness we need to ensure that these are not coming from our side. The omnipotent desire that the other be infinitely receptive to our gifts is an oppressive violence and a regressive intolerant demand. It arises from having an agenda, from imagining there is a deal that if I do this, you will do that. Fixed, insistent, repetitive forms of the dialogic are a debasement of the freeing potential of the open dialogic – a dialogic which reveals itself as unpredictable movement and ceaseless regeneration. Desiring to place the other where we need them to be in order to maintain our sense of who we are is not what might be considered ethical.

If our aim is to facilitate a friendly, contactful, person-to-person meeting, then we have to find a way of sharing space. This immediately highlights transference and counter-transference which operate as limitations on the sharing of space. For if I am transferring something onto you, then I don't see you as you; I am obscuring you in order to see you as somebody else. Essentially I am forcing you into my game, and if

you don't play my game, then I can't play my game, so I am going to resist you telling me that I am playing a game, because I am not playing a game, I am just being me and you don't understand me.

—I don't understand why I am coming here every week trying to speak to you when you don't understand a thing I say, what's the point of this?

—Oh, it appears that you feel a great deal of negativity towards me.

—Of course I do when you say stupid things like that!

Transference and counter-transference edit and control the potential of the open situation. They are a blindness that insists it sees clearly and thereby operates as a violence towards the other.

However, focusing on the transference or the reciprocal roles or whatever name we give to the interpersonal impact of our limiting patterns, will create a particular mood. Although it has been claimed that the work of psychoanalysis occurs within the transference and ends when the transference dissolves, this sets up a frame that is attractive to very few people. We could say that this is because it is a rare and special project – but perhaps that is a defensive inflation. Actually to be ethical, the method needs to be in the service of the person and not vice versa.

If we say that freeing ourselves from limitation is useful then we are not saying that limitations are the path. Rather than seeing our patterns as products of our past which have to be examined through repeatedly revisiting the past, we come to see the patterns as road-blocks, as obstacles on our path to where we want to go. Intentionality developed towards a concrete goal highlights the harm done by limitations. It also highlights our resistance to change, and the way in which limiting and punishing patterns can be incorporated into our self-definition and self-image. Clearly, for change to occur there has to be a libidinal cathexis to that project. How many psychotherapists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but the light bulb really has to want to change. Aspiration, hope, relational trust and confidence release the energy of our potential. So it is vital for the therapist not to enter the Kaufman Drama Triangle of Victim, Rescuer and Persecutor since that trap can run for years. And the patient has to be willing to step out of the Oedipal Triangle since it is a game they cannot win on the inside. They also need to step out of Beck's Depression Triangle where one has no hope about oneself, one's current circumstances nor one's future. Triangles tend to be death traps.

The therapist needs to be attentive to any glimmer of hope, any experiences of openness, trust, relaxation, any taste of the simple givenness of wellbeing. This is particularly important when engaging with the double task of getting rid of the obstacles and developing the good. This can easily feel overwhelming and impossible if there is a history of abandonment and under-resourcing. Therefore if the remembrance of moments of openness can be encouraged and brought into lived experience it offers the possibility of seeing that these are intimations of one's first nature, of one's potential which has been covered and forgotten but is still present and basically intact. Then it is not about creating a good experience out of nothing but of dropping attention to and investment in the negative thoughts and feelings as the descriptions of one's true nature. Then the work is in the present, in the here and now situation, focussing on opening to what is actually here and not mixing it with negative interpretations and predictions imported from the past.

This means avoiding the tendency to monologue – and acting to disrupt the other's tendency to monologue too. Communication is the basis of our human situation, a to-ing and fro-ing, a mutual engagement in which, we can hope, both parties will be touched and moved. This is the domain of participation, of co-emergence, and so it cannot be led by rules – both parties have to find a way to being open to seeing what happens. And of course this needs to happen in a social field where there are expectations and formal requirements.

So if I have a template of how I think another person should be, is that a violence or a support? If I don't have a template about how they should be, is that a generosity and a freedom or an abandonment? Finding the balance between these two contending extremes is difficult, for it is a dynamic balance that has to be found again and again in the dynamic flow of the encounter. In order to establish a sense of connection we might work with a four stage progression – but one that is always open to revisiting earlier stages as required.

Thus first we have Reception where the patient is received as they are with unconditional positive regard however they appear to be. As they disclose themselves they are met with empathetic attunement which aids the development of self-acceptance. This generates a sense that the therapist is an ally and is not going to impose an alien agenda. With this ethos setting the mood one can move on to Reformulation in which the patterns the patient has described are made more visible by being described in both letters and diagrams incorporating the illumination the model brings to the patient's narrative. If the as-I-am-ness of the patient has been received then there might be enough trust to support both parties in exploring how to interweave the raw story offered by the patient with the organising structures embedded in the model of therapy. Clearly many patients will want to adapt to what they perceive as being the desire of the therapist and so offering the indeterminacy of open hospitality prior to the tools required for Reformulation gives a chance of a less artificial presentation.

The third stage of Recognition requires a willingness in the patient to pro-actively engage in seeing what they are up to, moment-by-moment. The quality of the therapeutic alliance will influence both how they are able to mobilise towards that task and how honest and open they will be about how they are getting on. The fourth stage of Revision requires a sense of hope and actual possibility and this arises from the interplay of seeing oneself and one's environment with fresh eyes. By relaxing identification with habitual assumptions and patterns new possibilities will appear. Of course they were already there, embedded in the underlying potential of the experiential field – but now they become apparent and utilisable.

Of course we need to be mindful that it is easier to see the limitations and procedures of others than it is to see our own. This fact easily sets up an unhelpful sense of mastery for not only is the therapist the one presumed to know but actually *is* the one who knows something potentially useful about the other, the patient. Structurally this puts the patient in an inferior position which easily elicits feelings of not being good enough, of letting the other down or of feeling persecuted. Our very ease and mastery can be reassuring but in a Parent-Child way, so that somebody might be very impressed that you've been able to produce an interpretation or a reformulation letter and it may even make a lot of sense to them. But then, when it's their job to recognise what they're up to, it is that much more problematic, since they could feel stupid because it seemed so easy for you to see what is going on, but is so difficult for them. This could then feed into the reiteration of their procedures and lead to further blockage.

So, it may well be that we need to embed quite a bit of the attitude of Reception all the way through, and ensure that the formulation, the structuring, is done in a tentative way, remembering that it's only a hypothesis. If it makes sense to the patient, and if they want to pick it up and are able to pick it up, then with our help they can transform it from a hypothesis into a tool, into something that they can apply which will help to make life easier for them. But they have to make the move; we can't make it happen for them, and so one might need to be receptive to their stumbling and attend to their manner of learning. The more disturbed someone's childhood family experience has been, the more likely that their school experience wasn't very helpful either, due to distraction, impulsivity, anger, fear and so on. This leads to lack of success, scapegoating, exclusion and other difficult experiences which generate negative connotations to the project of learning. If this is the case then learning in psychotherapy is likely to be difficult too.

Therapists tend to be lifelong learners, always interested to find out more. Our patients very often don't have that attitude, so what seems nurturing and supportive and energising for us, may feel quite threatening and regressive for them, especially when we employ a model which privileges clarity.

There is no end to learning, for each moment is fresh. Learning to not know lets us learn how to be with the other. This is the practice of opening to life as it is – this is the practice of being alive.