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Return to the radical edge?

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Our article comes out of many playful dialogues and a shared revulsion with collective discourses, which ignore the sacred, and the rampant greed we (and our clients) endure as a result of advanced global capitalism. We presented at the conference jointly to share our relational creativity, and invited our audience to an interactive dialogue. We have argued together to write this article; please argue with us as you read it. Our hypothesis is that 'there is an alternative to scientific materialism as the dominant discourse in psychotherapy'. Here are our notes, written together, about what this may be. We suggest it is about *negative capability*, *emergence* and *immanence* in (human) nature.

Keywords: Negative capability; emergence; immanence in (human) nature; relational creativity

How can therapy rediscover a vital edge? Both humanistic therapy and Jungian analysis arose as radical responses to cultural malaise. Jung's moment of self-discovery coincided with the First World War, and his work in the *Red Book* (2009) when his psyche was flooded by images of collective catastrophe. At first, he assumed these were the early signs of a psychosis – then war broke out: he realized he had been carrying a feeling for the collective. The internal world does not make sense unless it is in relation to the outer. Each of us as psychotherapists carries our own part of the collective shadow. In our age, this is scientific materialism.

A focus on an internal world based on scientific materialism reflects an overemphasis in the Western world on individualism and leaves out a concept of a facilitating environment. Moves to national registration/regulation and social respectability have worsened an inappropriate accommodation with this cultural dis-ease. Possession of the 'Right Way' in psychotherapy can be a jealous and paranoid business. We are in danger of becoming lost in the bureaucracy of validation, turning our personal development into a series of ticked boxes on a Continuing Professional Development return, creating a spurious sense of professionalism and 'safety'. The unconscious cannot be made 'safe'.

How can we as psychotherapists reposition ourselves to recover our radical edge and the roots of the healing art we practise? To really get back to the roots we would need to deconstruct dominant assumptions about how psychotherapy operates. Moves to challenge its institutionalization are many, including Ronnie Laing's *Politics of Experience*, Paul Sheppard's *Madness and Nature*, Nick Totton's *Wild Therapy* and

Hillman and Ventura's *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World is Getting Worse*.

The focus in this article is on the crystallization and sanitizing of innovative ideas – without the raw immediacy of experience. Chris's journey began in the early 1970s with an encounter group run by Jerome Liss through the Anti-university. As a peace lover and meditator, it was a shock to discover his hidden anger. Nearly all the many groups he participated in during that decade were disturbing and challenging. Although uncomfortable, what drew him back was their vitality, edginess and authenticity. True, there was egoism and a cultish misuse of power by leaders, but there was also an untamed, undomesticated wildness flowing through these groups. The therapeutic brain police were not yet instigated. We were turned on, and not by drugs; but, like drugs, the high of these groups was not sustainable except by signing up to another group.

Dale's early years were spent in a commune, the Iona Community, a group of radical Christians and communists, where he discovered that there were lots of different versions of 'himself'. There were lots of different versions of everyone else, too. Only after leaving, aged six, did he realize that this experience of the collective, both conscious and unconscious, was not obvious to everyone. This gives rise to our shared idea – Self is a collective noun, and a verb – an action. 'Self' is a concept, it is not a thing. The attempt to reduce self-exploration to tick boxes is reification, and a denigration of a mystery.

The idea that each of us is a collective and part of a bigger collective is full of hope. That is why the psyche is political, because politics is the art of negotiating within and between collectives – as jazz musicians do when they agree to improvise. Dale's introduction to depth psychology came as a teenager, on being given Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* to read by a tutor at school during a time of trouble. Like Chris, he would say the excitement of opening to ideas such as 'synchronicity' spoke from the magic of a hardly known liminal world of new possibilities.

The creativity of early humanistic groups came about because we did not know 'how to do it'. We did not then possess a conceptual narrative to separate us from direct experience. The freedom to find out was what mattered. We knew that we did not know. Now the knowledge bank of psychotherapy is huge (more than 3000 current titles, and many journals). And this squeezes out fresh experience because we believe we do 'know how to do it'. We use maps, models, frames, procedures, flip-charts and textbooks to clarify, explain, direct and reassure ourselves that we are doing the right thing. We wonder whether, instead of this being self-validation, it is actually compliance: accepting discourses about power and professionalization, rather than embracing the unknown and seeking emergence – for instance, life itself is an emergent property.

Much psychotherapy training consists of inducting students into maps and models as a means to understand, and attempt to control, the uncertainty of the therapeutic relationship. Students often demand these safety blankets to protect them from the raw experience and the fear of not knowing what to do; as patients also demand a therapist to be the ideal parent they never had who will 'kiss it better'. Yet holding this open, fertile space is essential to the craft. As James Hillman had it, 'the uncertainty of what you and I are here for' is what we are here for! Therapy is far more like jazz than orchestral music. The participants have to improvise together to find new tunes, rather than replay the old, familiar stuck patterns of complexes.

In the late 1970s, for example, while training in systemic family therapy, Chris attended a conference starring Salvador Minuchin, the founder of structural family therapy (SFT). He was going to work live with a family, which had previously been

supported by a social worker. The social worker began to brief him about the family when he surprisingly said, 'Stop! I have met this family a thousand times before!' There was a gasp of impressed astonishment from the audience, but Chris felt a strong reaction against this. Minuchin might well have already intuited typical interactive patterns, but he had never met the unique configuration that was this family. The unknown had been banished in one swoop, robbed of its power to disturb, as Wilfred Bion, radical analyst and author might say.

While Bion might well have agreed not to be briefed, he would not have claimed he knew the family. He suggested that new thought depends on resisting the tendency to fill the empty space with 'knowing about'. His method is immanent and improvisational. In a challenge to colleagues, he recommended starting each analytic meeting afresh, forgetting what they knew and to wait with 'patience' for a pattern to evolve (Bion, 1970/1984).

This experiential learning is a radically different craft from academic study of difficult-to-cognize abstract thoughts. It is not that ideas and concepts cannot support understanding; our tendency to lead with them robs the learner of basing understanding in and of themselves. In 'The Four Quartets', T.S. Eliot (1968) describes a creative attitude as *waiting without hope*, because as he later follows up, the 'Hope and the faith and the love are all in the waiting'. This waiting without hope or expectation based on past knowledge is an important discipline, and has been called 'Negative Capability'. John Keats, who coined this term, described it as being 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts and reason' (Keats, 1899, p. 277). This requires the capacity to hold anxiety without becoming frozen (not at all easy), and to stay with uncertainty in order to allow for the emergence of previously unthought thoughts and perceptions. Such emergent notions are rich in ambiguity and not reducible to planned control.

In Zen Buddhism, it is called 'Beginner's Mind' (Suzuki, 1973), in which the many possibilities have not yet been reduced to an expert few. The start of humanistic therapy had this beginner quality of radical openness. Clearly, we cannot ditch our knowing and reclaim such innocence, but we could go round the wheel releasing ourselves from our attachments to what we claim to be correct – clinically and philosophically. We cannot regress to the unbounded mayhem of the past, but as Nick Totton (2010) has argued, practitioners who cannot offer their clients boundaries are dangerous; but those who cannot offer their clients boundlessness are useless.

Symbols are ambiguous. Like a politician, they tell the truth and they lie, they both tell the truth and do not tell the truth, they neither tell the truth nor do not tell it. They do all of these things all at the same time. They are an emergent property of thought. They let us make up equations – theories – views about ourselves and the world around us – improvisations where our internal and external collectives mesh. There is a music within us, and between us. Problems arise when there is a lack of aesthetics. One instrument gets too loud. Or we can only play the same tune over and over. That's a complex. In their resolution, symbols emerge from the unconscious, pointing to better ways to play. To use symbols requires a negative capability – first we have to learn NOT to use them. Here are a few examples.

A patient is working with growing older. They dream they wake up and go downstairs, and find their back door open, and a beautiful white fox is sitting on the mat. At which point, they wake up, go downstairs, and find the back door open and a beautiful white fox sitting on the mat. They're stunned.

In his first analysis, Dale dreamed of a stone full of bright colours, green and gold and purple, swirling round a silver centre. Next day, walking in Covent Garden, he saw it in the window of an art shop. He keeps it beside him when he works.

A patient is working with feeling they do not belong. They are a crow, outside human society. Dale gave them 'The Song of the Crow' by Ted Hughes to read. A week later, after a session, the patient went to sit in the park. A crow hopped up and talked to the patient. The crow brought its friends along. The patient did not know he could speak crow. 'It's mostly gossip,' he said. He comes back, knowing he could belong – even if it was not solely in the human community.

Jung knew about the symbolic world because he had been there, as is shown in *The Red Book*. We get in the way of letting the unconscious come to us with our busy narratives and discourses – we try to pretend they are theories – the word 'theory' just means 'a view' (from the Greek 'theoria', meaning 'to look at, to view, to behold'). We are both more interested in practice, and in the aesthetics of practice, than we are in theory. Whatever it is we do, we suggest it is an art, like music – or any other creative art. We can use science, if we like, to make tunes with, but that does not mean we 'have to believe' in science. As a Buddhist, Dale likes Buddha's advice: 'Trust your experience, do not believe a word I say. Try it yourself'.

Hillman and Ventura (1992) suggest that our consulting rooms become 'cells for revolution'. But this is less a call for insight or joining demonstrations than a radical shift in perspective, which invites us to take responsibility for how we are damaging the world and the world soul, rather than complaining about childhood.

What sort of language can carry such tentative and sensitive thoughts? Clearly it is not the explanatory or classifying language in which psychiatry specializes and from which some modalities of psychotherapy borrow. It is not the language of cheap and cheerful manualized therapies, or 'psychotherapy by numbers'. The use of such highly abstracted language offers explanation and the illusion of control, apparently saving the psychotherapist from the danger of overwhelm and losing their reflective stance. Hillman (1977) distinguished between the written language of psychology and the speech of the soul. We might imagine psychotherapy rooted in an oral tradition, coming up with process names such as 'sinks down into the underworld, heavy with grief'.

Alternatively, we might wish to use the poetic language of alchemy (Mathers, 2014). We cannot mistake alchemical images for facts. We cannot turn concepts into things with alchemy. That is anti-alchemy, turning gold (a concept) into lead (a thing). This happens all the time with the concept 'Self'. It is turned into a thing, and then 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life … '.

In the speech of soul, which is so close to that of dreams, all things are alive and all have potential agency. In terms of the experience of sensing our way into the depths of our relational therapeutic work, Chris loves this poem by Juan Ramon Jimenez (1980):
I have a feeling that my boat has struck,down there in the depths, against a great thing.
And nothing happens!Nothing … Silence … Waves.Nothing happens?OrHas everythingHappenedand we are standing now, quietly, in the new life?

End notes

Therapists are into exploring the inner world that so seamlessly resonates with outer worlds. It is like making music together. What instrument is this person? What tunes can they play? What tunes can we play together? The in-between liminal world is the place where the tunes come from. But in it there are no certainties, even that there are no certainties. We try to find ways

to live with uncertainty without going crazy. This means being able to play creatively with uncertainty. That's free jazz. That's Indian classical music. While not being random, notes call, rhythms beckon.

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