

THE LONG INTERVIEW

On Therapy, Play, Oppositionality, Fear, Defence, Projection – and, Perhaps, Transformation

Robin Shohet in interview-conversation with Richard House

Richard House [RH]: Robin, it's around five years now since we last dialogued in print (Shohet & House, 2015) – and we both felt it was about time we had another conversation! I was excited to receive your recent email about the book *Finite and Infinite Games* by James Carse, about 'spontaneous awakenings' and about my chapter on Georg Groddeck from 1997 which you've been revisiting. I sense something exciting happening for you around these apparent disparate phenomena, and wondered whether you'd like to start dialoguing about them. What come up for me around these themes is the life-changing spiritual impact that the greatest piece of music I've ever heard had on me nearly 50 years ago – the Mahavishnu Orchestra's 'Inner Mounting Flame' album (1971; see McLaughlin et al., 2016). On that earth-shattering album are two compositions titled 'Vital Transformation' (MO, 1971a) and 'Awakening' (MO, 1971b)....

Over to you to take this where you'd like to.

Robin Shohet [RS]: Let's start with the spontaneous awakenings, and a talk I heard recently by Steve Taylor who collected them for his book *Out of the Darkness*. Whenever I read about these and other awakenings, I am in awe. They describe it as everything being as it should be, there is peace, and personal problems seem not to be of relevance to this state. What strikes me most is that they are intensely personal but also beyond personal. The experiences I have had have led to days, even longer, of peace, but I knew there was an old ego mind lurking to re-assert itself, whereas with those the dissolution of the ego seemed permanent.

Now, I think psychology, even so-called transpersonal psychology, puts the self at the heart and helps this separate self to have a more fulfilled life. Nothing wrong with that; but the kind of state we're speaking of here, as I understand it, is of a different order. Why I like Groddeck so much is that he seems to span the separate self and this something 'other' state, which his contemporary Freud I think was frightened of and so put the individual separate self at the heart of his work.

James Carse's book *Finite and Infinite Games* is like a philosophical Groddeck. Psychologically the finite game would go for cure – the infinite game, for healing. So as Carse suggests, you can still have cancer and be healed. The cure involves success and failure, the healing goes on indefinitely and is a state of being. I think psychotherapy is moving into more and more finite games with measurement, outcomes, accreditation and so on. And as you say in your Groddeck chapter, this puts the therapist centre-stage and follows the medical model, which can veer between omnipotence and impotence. Medicine can and will cure you, except when it doesn't. This can lead to a blame mentality. I don't want to knock medicine or some aspects of psychotherapy, but to keep open the idea of studying mystical experiences and spontaneous recoveries. And I guess there is another point here. Once you become 'mainstream' like medicine and, increasingly, counselling, coaching and psychotherapy, you cannot *not* become more subject to the *Zeitgeist*. So we have a priesthood, rather than mystics like Groddeck.

I liked your describing your experience of encountering the Mahavishnu Orchestra. If one can classify it, it might belong to the ‘temporary awakening’ category, whereas the one’s Taylor describes are permanent. I think of Byron Katie, Eckart Tolle and the Indian sage Ramana Maharshi as those whose teachings have become famous; but what I liked about Taylor’s work is that there are dozens whom we never hear of. And with these there is an incredible sense of ordinariness.

I guess over to you now.

RH: So much here, Robin – where to begin? (or *jump* in/off). I looked at the James Carse book and ordered it immediately – I’m always struck by how hard it is to keep up with all the important writings out there in the world.

I was immediately struck by the book’s attending to play. The book blurb says

...infinite games are more mysterious [than finite games]. Their object is not winning, but *ensuring the continuation of play*. The rules may change, the boundaries may change, even the participants may change – as long as the game is never allowed to come to an end. (my italics)

Quite apart from the latter arguably being an apt metaphor for a transpersonal perspective on life, for me it also brings up the question of paradigms and worldviews – and (as Iain McGilchrist would say – McGilchrist, 2019) the ‘paradigm war’ that is currently raging between ‘left brain’ and ‘right brain’ in hyper/late-modern culture (I deliberately put these terms in quote marks to avoid a narrowly materialistic, neuroscientific understanding of them). This became all too clear around 2008 when England’s compulsory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum hopelessly misunderstood and misspecified the nature of play, and legislated for ‘play’ to be *used procedurally* by practitioners in what they grotesquely termed *adult-led* ‘structured play’ or ‘directed play’ (House, 2008). Here we could see (‘left-brain’) Audit Culture instrumentalism

prevailing – despite the Open EYE campaign¹ doing everything we possibly could to challenge ideologically this State legislative degradation of authentic play. The late, great existential therapist John Heaton wrote beautifully about authentic play over 40 years ago:

Play has an essence which is completely independent of the attitude of the player. If this is not realized, then *play becomes distorted by being cultivated*, as is commonly done in both educational and psychotherapeutic circles... All playing is a being played... [It] does not allow the player to behave towards it like an object... Play does not point to purposes beyond itself, it *celebrates* itself... *Its nature is completely distorted if it is considered psychologically as a known thing about which assertions can be made and which people then set forth to cultivate.* (my italics)

John Heaton, 1978, *passim*

I’d be interested to hear your thoughts on play, Robin, as it’s such a site of contestation between these opposing worldviews – and whether you see Carse’s book as speaking to this ‘paradigm war’. And even as I write, I’m aware that speaking in such military metaphors, and indeed constructing a ‘left-brain’ / ‘right-brain’ duality, might be part of the problem, and still connote being stuck in the old paradigm! Transcending Cartesianism (whatever that might mean and entail!) could become another focus for our conversation here, perhaps?

As this dialogue unfolds, I’m sure we’ll return in different ways to the other richnesses you’ve introduced above. But just to mention at this juncture the whole thing about cure versus healing, and the ‘medical-modellisation’ of therapy and counselling, constitute a massive issue for me – one that I found Groddeck speaking to directly and brilliantly around a century ago. And as IAPT, the march of CBT and the ‘happiness industry’, and the crass ‘industrialisation of therapy’ (Jackson & Rizq, 2019) continue apace, I wonder what

Humanistic Psychology and transpersonal perspectives can do to challenge and humanise these one-sided materialistic tendencies.

Too much from me... – back to you.

RS: You've already given the answer to what Humanistic Psychology and transpersonal perspectives can do – *play*. Play for me is not something we do, but something we are. If it is something we do, then it can be put into a box. Seventy-seven techniques to enhance your playing abilities. You are, I think, quite earnest about play, and oppositional about materialistic approaches which you caught in your language. Now that you are carrying those parts for me (I can be very earnest and oppositional), I am free to ask – can the materialistic be welcome, too? Over the years I have been very upset by the encroachment into my precious world of therapy by things like IAPT, CBT and, even more, seeing how much fear has entered into 'my' profession via complaints, naming-and-shaming pages in a widely circulated therapy magazine, fear of being sued. I see it a bit differently now. We are all stumbling around in the dark, and how can I say my stumbling is better than yours to anyone?

But you are on to something with play, and I would like to give you an example which I have written about elsewhere (Shohet, 2019; Shohet & Shohet, 2020). I was asked to be an external moderator for a coaching programme. The participants were being asked to do a live supervision session which was relayed to the four other candidates and the two moderators, another and myself. The first thing I said to the five participants before they did their sessions was, 'You have all passed'. There was much laughter and comments like, 'That's a relief'. I paused, and asked what was happening as I did not feel good. They then fed back they had been thinking, 'What kind of a course is this?', or 'Is this a trick?', or 'The exercise is meaningless if we don't have to prove ourselves'. Or even more scary, 'I am better than some and I want that recognised. You have just removed that recognition.' Once these conditioned voices

were voiced, the atmosphere changed. People said they could now really look forward to the sessions and were willing to take risks. And they gave each other very robust feedback, as there was no fear of failing someone. They played. And I think we would all play if we were not afraid.

So my answer is not to go oppositional, which I have often done, but to reduce fear in the field and then we would naturally play. Is this simplistic? All I can tell you is that I have heard from someone who attended the talk on this I gave to the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) that they have adopted this way of working, and are really enjoying the accreditation process. So if I had to describe my work, it is to reduce fear, and then playing cannot not happen.

Referring to your left and right brain comments, I am actually very left brained, but for some reason the world of therapy is where my right brain emerges to play, to improvise, to take risks; and it does sadden me how much our culture has become left-brain dominated. But everything has its time. The pendulum will swing back. I haven't referred to Groddeck again and all I want to say is that once he realised we were lived by The It, he could see that left-brained goals were not going to give any relief, and he and his patients could go more into the right-brain idea of life living through us, i.e. giving up control – which is anathema to the left brain. At least that is my take. What do you think?

RH: Rich and thought-provoking as always, Robin. 'Can the materialistic be welcome, too?' Phew – that's a biggie! I suppose for me, rather than seeing the task of every human-being being to individually find an appropriate balance between the material and the spiritual (if I can use those terms), for me it's more about every human being finding their destiny-path in this life; and for some, that will be one of challenging a culturally prevalent one-sided materialism. The latter is not the same as rejecting the material/matter and materialism

per se – it's about rejecting a world created *in the image of matter*, period. And an important part of that is trying to understand the best we can just why it is that one-sided materialism *does* hold such sway in Late Modernity, and what that might mean – spiritually, psychodynamically, and in evolutionary terms. I love Steiner's quote on this, when he said that the trouble with materialists is that they don't have the slightest idea about what matter is! (Steiner, 1987; see also Robinson, 2009).

Of course we're on the same page regarding play and fear – here's what I wrote in 2008, for example: 'Undue anxiety is antithetical to healthy learning. Playing, and the creative physical and mental space in which it needs to flourish, is one of the first casualties of the anxiety-saturated audit culture.' (House, 2008, p. 18). Your own depiction, '...to reduce fear and then playing cannot not happen' is just beautiful in its deep simplicity.

There's certainly lots to think about and explore around play – not least, what a left-brain, control-oriented professionalised therapy does with 'it'! (and of course it's not an 'it', I find myself wanting to say). Take 'Play Therapy', for example. One thing one can be sure about, perhaps, is that 'Play Therapy' by definition isn't play(ing) (cf. your '77 techniques' point, above). I recall what the great Susan Isaacs said about play – 'If we attempt to control and contain it, we simply make it lifeless and formal' (quoted in House, 2011; see also House, 2020). This also raises the interesting question as to whether therapy as a practice is more of a left-brain or right-brain activity. As you say, Groddeck was a decidedly 'right-brain therapist-cum-healer' (but I need to mention again that I'm not fully comfortable using these terms 'left and right brain', and want them to appear in big quotes marks). Maybe we could return to this one, and put our hearts to trying to understand therapy-as-a-cultural-practice within Iain McGilchrist's cosmology. (By the way, we're planning to include an interview with Iain McGilchrist in a forthcoming issue.)

This latter conversation can also morph into the very prescient question you raise about oppositionalism (to coin a term). I think I want to grasp for a position that would be called something like 'Both for *and* against oppositionalism'! What do I mean by this? – let's see if I can articulate it. I mean, first, that I accept that oppositionalism can sometimes (often?) be counterproductive, in terms of polarisation and so generating its opposite, and also the 'negative energy' that it generates. However, I don't think the New Age mantra that 'we must *always* be positive, and never negative and critical' cuts it, either! As we say in Steiner/anthroposophical circles, sometimes it's essential that we find our 'No!' – and as Rudolf Steiner showed in great detail, there is an ongoing dynamic between what he termed 'sympathy' and 'antipathy' that we need to engage with, and not formulaically plump for just one side of the polarity.

I don't pretend that such an engagement is easy and straightforward – but I strongly believe that it's a cop-out not to engage as fully and openly as we can with the *dynamic tension* of the polarity, and to think that there's some easy solution to it, and the discomfort it generates in us.

I find it impossible to be succinct in replying to your brilliant provocations, Robin – I hope you'll excuse my verbosity.

RS: I am glad you are taking up this discussion on oppositionality. I think it is inevitable in the human condition. So anger arises. Fine. Then I tell a story to justify the anger. And this is where we have the oppositionality. She made me do it, I was in the right etc. Anger without a story is just anger. The opposition comes in the justifications, stories after. And all causes have to be oppositional, I think. What you see as injustice, someone else might see as survival, i.e. to belong to their group they need to kill outsiders. And what we do in our judgement about so-called perpetrators is that we kill them in our minds. He is a disgusting paedophile or whatever. We go round and round the Karpman

triangle of victim, persecutor, rescuer. This does not mean saying the behaviour of a perpetrator is OK, but we commit to looking beyond behaviour to the human being underneath, and in that moment we move beyond oppositionality.

I have a wonderful book called *The Gentle Art of Blessing* by Pierre Pradervand who again and again shows how blessing even those who come with the intention of attacking you can transform the situation. I think I need to be clear. I might fight for a cause. Like anger, there's nothing wrong with that, but if I attach a story then oppositionality comes. So oppositionality is not in the behaviour but the mind-set of making someone wrong, as opposed to doing what needs to be done without attachment.

I think most of us have a great need to be right, which underlies so much of oppositionality. And causes give us the perfect opportunity. I am interested in going behind this need to be right, to have a cause. I see therapy as an exploration of consciousness, to explore all our belief systems in order to go beyond them. And when I really dig, I sit in the discomfort of self-hatred, which is horrible to sit in and with. Far easier to create opposition and fight rather than look within. The human mind is so adept at projecting, which is another name for oppositionality, and I have lots to say on projection. Is this worth exploring?

RH: First, Robin, I want to 'own up' (ha!) to some fear – because I think this fear touches on what you've just said in your previous answer. I sense that your sharing of your 'discomfort of self-hatred' has helped to create a space for me to own and then share some of my own vulnerability.

As you'll know, on several occasions I've taken an unconscionably long time to reply to your previous contribution to this conversation (including this time); and contrary to the excuses ('causes') that I've trotted out (none of which have been made up, by the way) to

account for the delay, I now realise that I've sometimes been scared *even to read* what you've written (let alone respond to it) because I fear you might take me to a place of *deconstructed rawness* where my carefully constructed (and protected) self-justifying stories just won't protect me any more, and do the job that my defences want them to do. (Is that a Byron Katie-type approach? – I seem to remember that it might be. And I also experience a Krishnamurti quality to the way you unerringly (and always sensitively and respectfully) 'dig'.)

So, when you write '...I think most of us have a great need to be right.... I am interested in going behind this need to be right, to have a cause...' – phew, that's a real biggie (for me, anyway). It would be so easy (for me) to stay in a very familiar rational self-justifying mode, and come up with extremely elegant and convincingly coherent rationales that defend my current view. But I also know 'rationally' that such an exercise is futile in the wider scheme of things, and merely keeps me where I am, rather than opening to the possibility of transformation. How chastening to see so clearly one's (my!) capacity for having a warm 'n fuzzy *belief system* about the virtues of change, human potential etc., while at the same time being emotionally clinging to a self-justifying story / stories that protect me from going to distressing places, and so are the very antithesis of change and transformation.

I'm also reminded of that exercise you invited participants in the Norwich Group Process Group to do nearly 30 years ago now, Robin – when you invited each of us to speak about why we are *crap* therapists! Perhaps it's only when we just drop our buttressing self-stories (that are so easy to misconstrue as 'self-esteem') that we *really* find out who we are in our totality, and suddenly then have at least some access to the potential that we could be – rather than spending so much energy shoring our-self up all the time.

'Therapy as an exploration of consciousness, to

explore all our belief systems in order to go beyond them’ – I think you’ve helped me do a bit of that here, Robin – thank you. And yet as I write, I also remember our dear friend Jill Hall once saying, ‘*Anything* can be used as a defence...’ – including (or even *especially*, I want to say) a theoretical story about the psychological defences! We could even invoke (and misquote) Marx here, perhaps! – i.e. ‘The [rationalist] philosophers have only interpreted the world.... The point, however, is to *change* it [and us].’

So yes, let’s talk about projection and defensiveness... – you start?

RS: First, thank you for your vulnerability and honesty. I felt lighter after reading your email, which happens when something really rings true.

Secondly, can we examine the idea of change? If I try and change anything or anyone, it will probably encounter resistance. And we are back to being oppositional again, which includes the wish to impose our view of the world.

So let’s take the idea of protecting the environment which I am guessing to you and me is self-evident. But to another it would mean losing a business opportunity. And of course my/our way is superior. I see this as the curse of the self-righteous, who hide their self-hatred with moral indignation and projection. (Don’t for one minute think I’m exempt from this – that will come later. At the moment I am just talking theory). It is all divisive. Suppose that instead, we *blessed* those who do not agree with us. From the heart. Then they have changed us, because we’ve moved from a morally superior position to one of deep acceptance. And this changes us regardless of what they do. Joan and I have a saying – ‘When you’re right, you’re wrong’ – i.e. the need to be in the right is, at another level, wrong. And blessing has the potential to change the other, too, because everyone is at some level craving this kind of acceptance. So trying to change someone meets

resistance, while deep acceptance can and does lead to change.

This might look like condoning, but this is not what I mean at all, as I discovered when I did a lot of work on forgiveness. Acceptance or blessing or forgiving does not stop me from challenging. It just means I do it from a place of seeing the other as part of me. I find my own inner polluter, my own toxic thoughts. I do not tell a story that makes the other into a demon, so that I can feel right or good or superior.

I have been very clever (i.e. stupid) and devious at hiding my self-hatred, not in fighting causes, but seeing other people’s shadow with great intuition. I have been right, and oh so wrong. I’ve played this out with Joan, seeing her faults with great accuracy, tracing their origins, but so wrong about the loving being behind them all. And I am even ready to admit my own shortcomings, so as not to face this self-hatred. I’ve written about this in *In Love with Supervision* (p. 148). It happened when the universe gave me a gift that was so awesome, I could no longer project any fault in the other, and I was faced with myself. Not my real (i.e. loving) self which I believe is the core of who we are, just what has been called the shadow. No wonder we/I retreat to projection. In biblical terms it could be called the Dark Night of the Soul. Mine was more a twilight, which was bad enough.

I have been very curious about this self-hatred. I have for a long time seen it as a variation of original sin, shadow, ego; but reading work on developmental trauma has enabled me to have a more compassionate view of myself and others. The traumata are not necessarily in one event, but as the concept suggests, ongoing over a period of time. And the baby has no-one to talk to, and tells a story to itself that it is their fault. There’s nothing new here, but I found that I needed compassion for this baby before I could have compassion for others’ babies – and let’s face it, we’re all babies in disguise, or not so disguised. I think we substitute baby self-talk (‘I am no good’) with adult identity self-talk (‘I

am a worthy person’), an identity which we defend with causes sometimes, or in my case seeing shadow in the other.

I have a drama game in which people introduce themselves to each other without saying a word of truth. Hilarious. I follow this up with an exercise where they take it in turns, five minutes each, to say to the other, ‘Tell me who you are’. One person said that they liked the second exercise better because it was more truthful. I said I doubted it.

So finally on to projection. As I write I have just had an article published in *Thresholds* (spiritual journal of BACP) called ‘No life has ever been saved’, which looks at what we are projecting on to corona virus. I suggest that death has been postponed, which is very different. Saving lives carries the omnipotent fantasy of defeating death (making it other) rather than seeing it as part of life. And as Jesus pointed out all those years ago, ‘For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it’ (Matthew 16:25). Anyway, in this article I look at projection – one of the ways we try and preserve our identities, and I write:

Projection is a quadruple whammy. First it makes others into enemies and thus increases blame, stress, conflict in the world. Second because we have attacked them, we will consciously or unconsciously fear retaliation. Third it makes us feel justified as we believe our projections. This gives rise to all sorts of behaviour which we might find unacceptable or down right morally reprehensible if we had not projected. And finally we learn nothing. What is unacceptable still resides in us waiting for the next projection.

I see people like Byron Katie asking us to re-own our projections, which is why I love her work.

Enough, I think. Thank you again for doing this. I notice past the words, I feel our wish to use our very dominant minds to go beyond them.

RH: All this sounds and feels right to me, Robin

– thank you. I like this – ‘...trying to change someone meets resistance, deep acceptance can and does lead to change’. That sounds eminently Rogerian, and I think this is the deep insight that Carl Rogers had, too. My hunch is that any genuinely open-minded, thoughtful therapist learns this precept pretty quickly once they start practising – and I think it’s a deeply humanistic principle; though of course the humanistic therapies do, alas, have our fair share of ‘techniques’ and ‘modalities’ designed to ‘make’ clients change – yuk, and double-yuk.

As a campaigner (political, environmental), I also find it on the streets, too. I think there’s something about *creating a space in which genuinely new thinking can be allowed to be born*, with people who aren’t feeling the need to defend their position or belief(s) being able to allow (new) thoughts to come to them, in a way that folk who *are* in ‘defence-mode’ are far less able to. So on the ‘Politics Kitchen’ street-stall in Stroud, that was the heart-child of my dear friend Skeena Rathor (see <https://tinyurl.com/y4gtwppd>, and her interview in this issue), we do our best to simply listen (as if really genuine listening *were* ‘simple’!), and not preach or try to convert. But in the cauldron of institutional party politics, and all the expectations in that world, it can be difficult to retain that stance.

I’m wondering what your view is about ‘spin’, propaganda and the so-called ‘post-truth’ era, and how people are so prone to being manipulated in their beliefs – something that Freud’s double-nephew, Edward L. Bernays, surely has a great deal to answer for (Tye, 2002; see also Ewen, 1996; Chomsky, 2002). Is the ‘deep listening and acceptance’ way-of-being also appropriate when faced with situations where huge swathes of citizens have been subjected to, and influenced by, propagandist manipulation and positioning? To give a specific example here: would ‘just listening’ have been the appropriate response to the rise of Nazism in 1930s Germany, for example? (And I don’t underestimate how difficult these issues are, Robin.)

Re projection, can I make just one point, which for me is very important. I think there's an issue about being over-simplistic regarding 'projection'. Is it helpful to apply binary thinking to such a complex notion – such that something is either 'projection', or it isn't? Does that binary actually represent accurately what happens in human relating? – I'm not at all sure that it does. For example: if we agree that 'projection' has happened, does it necessarily follow that what has happened bears no relationship to reality? Is it not possible for a person to project as a psychological process, *and* the nature of that projection also be an accurate-enough description of, or commentary on, 'reality', *at the same time*? I think this is important, because in my experience, therapists in particular tend to throw the label 'projection' around (and I'm emphatically *not* saying you're doing this!) as if, once it has occurred, it necessarily completely invalidates both the projection and the person doing the projecting. Is this really how it is? – I'm not at all sure. I'd welcome your thoughts on this.

We could go on for ever, Robin (well, you know what I mean! – perhaps?!...). But we're over our word-count already – so the last words are with you. Any final reflections on what I've just said, or on the whole dialogue we've had. As always, I've learnt a lot from engaging with you, Robin, and I sense it will be the same for our readers – a heart-felt thank-you.

RS: A pleasure. I love working things out in dialogue. So, more on projection. Let's take Donald Trump. First level. He lies, manipulates, abuses power and so on. Undeniable. Next level, I find the Donald Trump in me. I have lied, manipulated, abused power. Next level, a reframe. See him as a very generous man who is willing to receive all our negative projections so we can feel self-righteous. Another level, this from a friend, Elmer Postle:

I awoke with a sensation in my heart and chest that felt so happy. In the dream I had been having, the truth beneath the behaviour

and persona of the President was evident: the wonderful soul of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, was clear. What is more: in my waking the other stuff, what he has been doing and saying, was virtually invisible and not the focus. What was clear was he was a wonderful soul on a life journey that was challenging. In my heart I felt only joy at this awareness and I was at one with him... As the dream settled into the day and was related a couple of times, what became clear was that I had rescinded, drawn back my projections on to him. If I walk around projecting my fear on to this man, making him bad around the climate issue, for example, whilst continuing to contemplate long haul journeys across the globe myself, I am asking him to shoulder some burden of responsibility that I am not willing to take. As Greta Thunberg said about Trump, at least he's honest about what he thinks, in comparison to corporations that say one thing and do another.

So seeing this beautiful soul on a very particular journey enables me to receive the challenge of that person's life. If I am connected with him at this level he and I are not separate. He must be pushing me to accept something about myself. If I am hating him, then it's my hatred I am asking him to carry.

Living this is another matter, but the dream opens up the idea that those we hate most have the most to teach us. And if we believe our projections, *and do not see beyond them* (yes, Trump does behave badly), then we add to the strife in the world. Back to oppositionalism again.

I liked what you wrote about listening. In the state of true listening I think we dissolve oppositionalism. In Elmer's dream he went beyond that. And in my life I would love to be in that state where I could accept what is. Even if I were to fight for a cause, I could do so without making the other person 'other'. And it is this othering that creates the problems, because I am also someone else's 'other'. In fact this approach – which, I hasten to add, I rarely live (and this is a whole new article as how and why I don't, even though I believe it) – is not

passive. Most of our so-called active behaviour is reactive, conditioned and, as I've mentioned, convinced of its own rightness. Can I sit in a place of 'don't know' even for the most obvious black and white instances, like murder, rape, paedophilia? Earlier I mentioned the book *The Gentle Art of Blessing*, which I think invites this. People to whom I recommend it say 'yes'. This makes sense. It is beyond psychology, judgement, making other. Even if I can't live it, I can embrace it conceptually, and some of its philosophy might trickle down from my thinking into my behaviour and make for a more compassionate world.

Note

- 1 For details on the work of the Open EYE campaign, see <https://tinyurl.com/yvg6yu4m>.

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Robin Shohet and his partner Joan have been supervising for over 40 years. In 1979 they co-founded the Centre for Supervision and Team Development (www.cstdlondon.co.uk) through which they have been teaching supervision

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SOME HUMANISTIC WISDOM

“Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person’s ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me. Neither the Bible nor the prophets – neither Freud nor research – neither the revelations of God nor man – can take precedence over my own direct experience. My experience is not authoritative because it is infallible. It is the basis of authority because it can always be checked in new primary ways. In this way, its frequent error or fallibility is always open to correction.” (From *On Becoming a Person*, 1961.)

Carl R. Rogers, 1902–1987