

The Turn Within: A Self-in-Relation to Counselling

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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Beyond theory, strategy, and skill, who is the person of the counsellor? This qualitative study, informed by criteria derived from the interrelation of autobiographical self-study research, phenomenological inquiry, narrative inquiry, arts-informed research, and alternative ethnographic inquiry, seeks to answer certain fundamental questions which arise when considering the self of the counsellor in relation to the practice of counselling: How can one best help another to heal? What is the nature of therapeutic presence? What does a counsellor need to be attuned to within him or herself so to be most present with another? How does one ensure that one is supporting growth and not enabling dependence? How can one be most authentic with oneself and another? How does one deal with one's insecurities, uncertainties, and fears in taking on the privilege of listening to and witnessing the life of another?

Drawing on the theoretical traditions of humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, zen therapy, spiritual therapy, phenomenological-existential psychology, and feminist counselling, this intentionally self-revelatory thesis seeks to answer the above questions based on an honest and rigorous self-reflective process of the author's experiences as a beginning counsellor. With the process informing the format, the work is represented through the merging of a variety of voices: the poetic inner voice of experience, the academic narrative voice, and the voices of those who inspired and led through their theoretical traditions. This exploration led to several notions: that helping another cannot be done without helping oneself; that cultivating presence with another is dependent on the cultivation of presence with oneself; that the growth of another is supported by allowing the process to lead; and finally that the turn within to inner reflection is a necessary and continual requirement for the counsellor as self-in-relation to the practice of counselling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am a firm believer that people cross our paths for good reason, and there are several who both crossed my path and helped me to follow it during the writing of this work.

(paths which follow
paths which lead
through time and space)
on others' paths you see the light
the point at which they are
the light shines never brighter
than when the path is where you are
look to them
learn from them
those who understand your mind
be with them
be free with them
your paths have intertwined
A.F. 1985

First, to John Sumarah, my supervisor, teacher, and friend. His ability to accompany me on this journey while allowing me nevertheless to venture out alone and trust myself, allowed this work to speak as honestly as it does. I am grateful for his guidance, his presence, and his understanding of the mystery of the process. Thank you.

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To my daughter, Sarah, who in herself is an unfolding mystery and a challenging guide.

Finally to all those who lead, silently, beckoningly, towards where the truth lies.

Thank you.

Dear Reader,

This is the beginning of the beginning of the beginning of the beginning, for I find I am in a continual process of beginning this work. Although the words may be here written, and thus, in their own way frozen as text on page, this represents merely another beginning to an endless inquiry. The words here written will attempt to convey in their limited capacity, a representation, a weaving of sorts, of my experience, reflection, and journey of both the person that I am in the process of becoming, and that person-in-process' experience of herself as a beginning counsellor. Having been exposed to the theories, the strategies, and the skills related to counselling, I am still left with certain questions. These questions pertain to the fundamental issue of who the counsellor, as a person, is. When I sit, as a counsellor, with a client in session, I am confronted with myself: how should I respond? how do I feel? where should I turn for guidance? I have the option to endlessly turn outwards, to seek in the theoretical texts the insights of all those who have devoted themselves to the articulation of interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics. This option alone is a lifetime's work and I am committed to continue this education. However, I also have the option to stop for a moment before I refer to the work of another, and turn within. This turn, this inward search for understanding, is where I have oriented myself with this present work. Standing on the precipice between inner and outer, subjective and objective, I have attempted to explore my experience deeply. I have attempted to explore my self-in-relation to the work of counselling. My hope is this: that my voice will speak through these written words and that the renderings of my experience will in some way connect with others. Perhaps together we can remember that we are constantly in process, as people and as counsellors, and although

we all strive to do and say the right thing, we are, with others, partners in this dance of ambiguity.

Sincerely yours.

The underlying questions:

As a beginning counsellor with limited practicum experience in the M.Ed. Counselling Program, I have found myself with far more questions than answers as to how to be a good counsellor. I have come to believe that being a good counsellor requires that one has a thorough foundation of theory and technique. Yet, in addition to the learning of theory and technique, there remains the person of the counsellor: who we are, how we live, and how we orient ourselves within our practices. In my own experience in the role of a counsellor, I have been on a relentless investigation of my motivations around my choice of response and the ethical responsibility I have to my clients. I am committed to self-development which I have come to think of as the unending process towards emotional and psychological maturity and the commitment to oneself to fulfill one's true potential. It is the journey through pain and hardship, the willingness to face one's fears, and the commitment to rigorous self-reflection. Ultimately, my belief is, that as a counsellor, I can only go as far with a client, as I have undertaken to go with myself.

This work sets out to explore my personal experience and understanding of what it is to be a counsellor. How can I best help another to help him or herself? What do I need to be working on within myself so to be most present with another? What is the nature of therapeutic presence? How can I meet another in such a way that I am supporting growth and not enabling dependence? How can I be most authentic with myself and another? How should I deal with my uncertainties, fears, and trepidations, in the taking on of this privilege of listening to and witnessing the life of another? My data is myself, my experience, my insights. My exploration is unending and this work is the

fruit of where I sit with these questions today, near the close of my M.Ed. Counselling Program.

how can I describe my inner space
when I sit with another?
the uncertainty
the knowing
the balance
the drawing on theory
strategy
skill
the drawing on
the moment
the stillness
the All
the listening
to myself
to them
to hear
the emergence
the emergency
the readiness
the waiting
to know what to say
the item that sparks
that twigs in me
that causes me
to interject
to speak
to challenge
a faulty self-perception?
to explore an ambiguous reaction?
to probe for more information?
to support a courageous act?
all of the above?
looking for clues
clues to you
to find our path
together

and I stumble at times
needing your assistance
and you stumble at times
needing mine
and together
we proceed
in this dance
back and forth
and I am
not always sure
what to say
so I just might
say things
spontaneously
just being me
not counsellor
and hope it's okay
like I'm really proud of you
and then wonder
I am encouraging dependence?
but she needed to hear it
I needed to say it
I trusted that feeling
and went with it
she didn't become dependent
she just needed someone
to acknowledge
where no one had before
and so
more often than not
as I struggle to understand
what I say
and why I say it
I have learned to trust
the impulse that arises
to trust
what comes forth

The many voices of methodology:

I have wondered often how to present this work, for in a sense I am presenting myself. The more I wrote and reflected, the more I realized that although I want this work to represent my voice, this voice takes on many colours and in itself, is multilayered. As such, this work will represent a variety of voices, most of them mine, some of them the voices of clients with whom I worked, others the voices of those whose views supported and encouraged my own. These voices will also be represented in a variety of formats: my inner voice will be represented in an alternative font, as will be explained below, whereas the citations I have used of others will be italicized. When using the voices of my clients I have done this in a recollected manner and have not used their words verbatim. (Further, I have taken every care to protect the anonymity of these clients. If however, for any reason any of these people is recognizable to a reader, I ask that the reader respects and protects their anonymity.)

A narrative voice, written in an academic style, (such as I am presently using), will serve to weave the voices together. The variation of these textural formats is intended to create a text that attempts to reflect the nature of my experience, for I have found that the voice of my inner experience does not adhere to the more linear quality of academic writing. As such, not only are the words on the page intended to convey meaning, but also the format is meant to convey a sense of the process which I underwent in the writing of this work.

As these voices interweave, some will tell stories, some will explore themes, some will evoke images of my experience. I am trying to articulate for myself my inner

experience of what it is that I draw on, beyond theory and strategy, when I sit with another. The articulation of this phenomenon, is inherently deep and multifaceted, and in a sense I feel that it can never be completely articulated. It is this sense that led me in part to explore a phenomenological mode of inquiry, as my understanding of this methodology is that it attempts to describe the *essence* of a phenomenon. The essence which I am attempting to describe is my understanding of what it is for me to be a counsellor. The methodology of phenomenology, maintains that the world of immediate or “lived” experience, precedes empirical knowledge. In other words, what is most real, is the actuality of subjective lived experience, and not the objective reality which presents itself as an object for subjective experiencing. A phenomenological analysis then, seeks to describe the “manifold of appearances” that belong to a given phenomenon.¹ In other words, as Sokolowski suggests, “...a phenomenology of meaning would spell out the manifold through which meanings are given; a phenomenology of art would describe the various manifolds by which art objects present themselves and are identified.”² The goal of this work then would be to describe the various manifolds through which my world of immediate experience as related to my experience of myself as a beginning counsellor presents itself.

How does one go about describing the manifold of appearance of a phenomenon? Phenomenological methodology distinguishes two different attitudes: ‘the natural attitude’ which can be described as our ordinary attitude toward the world and our experience of it when we are engaged in everyday activities, and ‘the phenomenological attitude’ which can be described as a disengaging from the natural attitude so to reflect on

it and its underlying beliefs. This intuitive-reflective stance is referred to as ‘imaginative variation’³, a process whereby one strives to reach a feature that it would be inconceivable for a phenomenon to be without. As such that feature would serve to illumine that phenomenon’s essence. To embody the state of ‘imaginative variation’, phenomenological methodology prescribes the use of *epoche*, a Greek word meaning, “to refrain from judgement, to abstain from, or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things.”⁴ Also referred to as ‘bracketing’, it is a process of “setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time.”⁵ *Epoche*, in phenomenological inquiry, refers to a state of being that strives to orient the researcher to *see* what is there before judging, “to clear a space within ourselves so that we can actually see what is before us and in us.”⁶

In a phenomenological interview then, the researcher strives to ‘bracket’ any expectations of causal relationships, any presuppositions, any judgements, so to see and hear clearly what emerges. In this work, however, I am faced with a different sort of challenge in that I am both researcher and participant; I am my own source of study. How can I detach myself from myself in order to gain an unbiased and nonjudgemental account of my own experience?

Within this work you will find portions of text that are written in this font, “Perpetua”. Selections written in this font always indicate a move from an academic voice, to an inner voice of experience. These selections are the result of a period of writing which occurred over a two week period at the end of the M.Ed Counselling program in which I was

enrolled. My approach to this writing was to write everything that came to me, without judgement, that related to my experience, my questions, and my sense of what it means to me to be a counsellor. What follows is a sample of this quality of writing, written at the beginning of this process of exploration.

I want to get out everything that is mine....everything that I feel, think, believe, everything that has emerged in my consciousness this past year, and throughout my life. I want to do this before I read, before I refer, before I cite. I give my voice permission to express anything and everything it wants to without censure before I refer to someone else's voice.

I spent much of my life feeling that my voice wasn't good enough, that surely there was someone who had said it better, surely I could find it already expressed somewhere if I only looked hard enough. Now however, I feel as though I want to express everything that belongs to me before it is 'contaminated' or influenced by what I read.

I believe to the best of my ability that during this period of writing, I was engaged in the phenomenological *epoche*, in that I allowed all to be written without allowing the editing, judgemental voice to enter into the inquiry. It is this portion of the work which I have undertaken with a phenomenological mode of inquiry wherein I allowed all the

manifestations of my experience to present themselves in a ‘manifold of appearance’. It was a remarkable period of writing for me, in that I felt as though I was allowing everything to flow through me, into the words on the screen. I would sit in front of my computer and simply wait until the words came, and without editing, without judging, I would write. I found that as I sat and recalled experiences of my practice over the past year, I was flooded with sensation, emotions, and images.

My experience is that when we recall, we are not offered lines of text, but rather fragments of phrases, physical sensations, images and space. In this work then, words became my medium, and I used them (or rather they used me) to evoke a picture, or an experiential environment. Without consciously making a decision to do so, the words at times fell into a vertical rather than a horizontal format. They just seemed to flow in that direction. In this regard, at times they may appear as poetry (as on page 5), but my conscious intention was not to sit down and write poetry, it is just the way it came out. Nevertheless, as Robert Frost said of the poem, it “is the shortest emotional distance between two points,”⁷ those points being the “speaker and the reader”.⁸ My hope is that these selections will serve to immerse the reader into my world of experience as I experienced it more directly than had I tried to describe it in a more academic style of writing. At other times, this inner voice flowed more as lines of text, where instead of attempting to evoke a poetic representation of my immediate lived impressions, it became more analytical. These selections are also represented in the alternative font, however they are indented on the page in a column-like format to distinguish them from the academic voice.

This early period of writing from which these selections arose, came to an end of its own accord, the words stopped flowing, the muses stopped singing. I was left with approximately sixty pages of writing that had issued from me in a quite wonderful and powerful way, but with also the question of how to incorporate them into the body of a thesis. It was then that I turned to the methodologies of narrative and autobiography, for I envisioned a way of telling a story of my experience which included an interweaving of what had arisen in this early work, along with a narrative written in a more academic style, to thread it together. I discovered a methodology referred to as ‘narrative of the self’, in which the writer, “using dramatic recall, strong metaphors, images, characters, unusual phrasings, puns, subtexts, and allusions”⁹ creates a ‘plot’ so that the reader can emotionally relive the experience of the writer. My research question, regarding the counsellor and on what she or he draws beyond theory and strategy, is located within the context of my lived experience. The narrative form of inquiry finds its strengths in the creation of meaning and the understanding of lived human experience.¹⁰ The goal of narrative inquiry then is mostly to construct stories. In other words, comparable to the Postmodernist view, narrative asserts that there is no one absolute, underlying, and true human reality. Therefore, narrative inquiry is not a mode of representation but construction,¹¹ an “entering into the phenomena and partaking of them.”¹²

This format resonated with me as being potentially quite powerful, as in making my interior world accessible to a reading public, it allows for a bridging between the worlds of public and private life.¹³ In this sense this work is consciously self-revelatory because my intention is to give my inner world a voice. My desire has been to grasp the

possibilities of meaning which have arisen in my reflection and to find the language to express that which often resides beyond language.

In my reading of autobiographical forms of self-study research, I came upon the important notion that “self-study points to a simple truth, that to study a practice is simultaneously to study self: a study of self-in-relation to other.”¹⁴ In other words, my self-study of my practice as a counsellor impacts directly both on my self-development and my development as a counsellor. Further, although a self-study has the self as its focal point, the actual area of interest is the self-in-relation, in this case, the self-in-relation to the practice of counselling. I have had to maintain balance in this work, so that on the one hand, it does not become merely an opportunity for me to engage in my self-development, and on the other hand, it does not go too far on the opposite extreme and become merely an investigation into the practice of counselling. Instead I hope to achieve an exploration which is both personal and hence accessible to the reader, and practical in that it explores some fundamental questions related to the art and practice of counselling.

What has ceaselessly concerned me with this approach, however, is against which criteria should I be basing this work? When I am my own source for research data, how can I ensure for validity? reliability? credibility? generalizability?

Different methodologies make use of different modes of seeing data. On the one hand, positivist methods look to objective data as a means of evaluation, whereas interpretivist methods rely more on the subjective interpretations which the researcher and participants bring to the data. The criteria of validity, reliability, and generalizability,

referred to by Steiner Kvale as “the methodological holy trinity of psychological science”¹⁵, are in many respects the result of other positivistic conceptions such as reason, fact, universal laws, evidence, objectivity, truth, among others.¹⁶ In contrast to this approach, qualitative methodologies tend to align themselves with the post-positivist interest not in a static and fixed idea of truth, but rather the experience and meaning of that experience, derived by individuals and cultures. As such, quantitative research looks to that which can be measured, whereas qualitative research seeks to explore that which is unquantifiable, the more ambiguous arena of the personal and social world of constructed meaning. In a discussion regarding the use of positivist terminology to apply to qualitative research topics, Bochner states:

In our hearts, if not in our minds, we know that the phenomena we study are messy, complicated, uncertain, and soft. Somewhere along the line, we became convinced that that these qualities were signs of inferiority, which we should not expose....Traditionally, we have worried much more about how we are judged as “scientists” by other scientists than about whether our work is useful, insightful, or meaningful---and to whom. We get preoccupied with rigor, but are neglectful of imagination.¹⁷

If the traditional criteria of quantitative research are inappropriate as a means by which to evaluate the unquantifiable phenomena explored through qualitative research, to what must I then turn? I have looked at numerous fields of inquiry to find that there is no single one to which I can adhere solely. To do so, would be to perhaps limit the possibilities of this study by forcing them into a pre-designed methodology. Yet, I have searched externally to find criteria to ‘validate’ this work and came upon this statement by Bochner:

*The whole issue of criteria ends up rather pitifully as little more than an attempt to reach for some source outside ourselves to arbitrate differences of opinion, protect against subjectivity, and guarantee rationality.*¹⁸

When I am working with myself as my site of research how can I begin to arbitrate differences of opinion, protect against subjectivity, or guarantee rationality? Ontologically and epistemologically, I am only working within my frame of reference. On what can I rely? Interestingly enough, this question pertains directly to my research question as a counsellor.

Bullough and Pinnegar state; “Self-study is a mongrel: The study is always of practice, but at the intersection of self and other, and its methods are borrowed.”¹⁹ To arrive at an understanding of available criteria which I could then borrow, I have looked to the guidelines for autobiographical forms of self-study research, arts-informed (life history) research, narrative inquiry, phenomenological inquiry, and alternative ethnographic inquiry. As this work embraces elements from all of these traditions, I have looked to the criteria which have been seen to interrelate and in a sense unify their perspectives.

The guidelines that I have chosen to follow reflect an integration and interrelation of the above-mentioned fields of inquiry. Each guideline is italicized and followed by a brief discussion locating its fields of inquiry and its value.

Guideline 1: The work should possess verisimilitude.

Van Maanen²⁰, suggests that the criterion of verisimilitude is an important and underrated criterion. Verisimilitude is defined as a text's ability to "to reproduce (simulate) and map the real."²¹ This notion overlaps with the autobiographical self-study guideline for work that "ring(s) true and enable(s) connection,"²² and within an alternative ethnographic field, the expression of a reality that is credible²³ and authentic.

What is it that makes a work credible? believable? realistic? In my opinion it comes with the intention which I bring to this work. Throughout my writing I have intended to delve deeply and report with as much accuracy, honesty, and courage, the concrete details and emotions which have coloured my experience. I have dug at my actions and underneath them in an attempt to accurately portray a realistic representation of the many layers of myself with all their inherent ambiguities and contradictions. It is this presentation, of a self-in process that I have tried to offer.

Guideline 2: The work should have aesthetic merit.

Aesthetic merit comprises not only the use of creative uses of language²⁴, but also whether the text allows for interpretation and the promotion of insight.²⁵ Through the use of alternative forms of representation, i.e. poetic, metaphorical, dialogue etc., my hope is that the reader will be engaged in such a way that he or she will be required to experience the text differently and in so doing bring to it his or her own interpretation. As Cole and Knowles state, "to craft a life is to engage in artmaking."²⁶ My intention has been to

weave this work with the several voices that have comprised it in such a way that it flows intuitively and organically so to offer a complexity of form and movement.

Guideline 3: The work should be driven by a moral commitment.

This work has both an intellectual and a moral purpose.²⁷ Although it is a self-study, it seeks to explore the ethical obligation that I have to my clients in my pursuit of self-understanding and development. In this regard it seeks to “improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other”²⁸ where ‘other’ refers both to my clients who will be indirectly affected through my development and also to those beginning counsellors who may read this and have cause to reflect on the issues explored herein. This criterion also aligns itself with the narrative notion of transferability²⁹, wherein the work can speak to the experiences of others in the field.

Guideline 4: The work should possess a holistic quality.

As stated by Clandinin and Connelly when narrative is done well, “one does not feel lost in minutia but always has a sense of the whole.”³⁰ In the realm of arts-informed research, Coles and Knowles state, “From purpose to method to interpretation and representation, arts-informed research is an holistic process and rendering.”³¹ Through the use of the phenomenological notion of horizontality, my desire has been to explore, as the term describes, all of the horizons of the phenomenon of my impressions of myself and work as a beginning counsellor. This method seeks to describe, through the manifold of appearances of this phenomenon, its essence. My hope is that although there are

specific accounts and renderings of this phenomenon, the sense of the whole, will pervade these elements.

Having articulated these guidelines my invitation to readers is that they critically reflect on what they read to determine if I have upheld my intentions. As stated at the beginning, this work is in process, as it is representative of a person, a counsellor, and a writer, in process. Not only do the words convey meaning, but also the format is an inherent part of this meaning-making process. The different voices presented will strive to portray the many layers of this investigation; the inner voice, the academic voice, the voices of clients, and the voice of those who have inspired the process. In the end, my aim is not to elucidate a fixed and absolute truth, but to provoke, question, and challenge myself and others, to explore wherein the truth lies.

my voice
is comprised
of several voices
as I am multilayered
so is my perspective
there is the voice
of the researcher, the academic
who describes the process
who looks to the work of others
for guidance, for communion, for reassurance
there is the inner voice
of experience
my experience as a counsellor
as I have fumbled and fought
to understand what I do
there is the inner voice
of experience
my personal experience
as I have fumbled and grown
over the years of my life
to understand what I do
as a woman
as a daughter
as a wife
as a mother
there is the inner voice
of the commentator
who watches, observes, and comments
on what she sees around her
in our culture
there is the voice
that appeals
that appeals to others
to reflect
to reflect on what they may have already
to reflect on what I say
and asks with humility
that my words
be considered

The evolution of the topic:

This is the story of how this came to be. When I began last fall in the M.Ed. Counselling program, I was a student, uncertain, yet determined. I knew that I needed to determine a topic for my thesis research, and I thus began to rigourously write and reflect on questions that I had carried with me for ages and those that were newly emerging as a result of the experiences I was undergoing in my education in the classroom and in my practicum setting: Why do we fear freedom and inner power? Why do we run from confronting ourselves? Why have we constructed a culture that seems to condone and encourage escapism? I began searching for articles on fear of freedom, fear of self-confrontation, fear of self, fear of inner power, and found little that dealt with my concerns. I withdrew countless books from the library on self-deception, self-concept, self-realization, and self-defeat. Piles of books littered every flat surface of our apartment. As I began to read, I became quickly overwhelmed at the amount of theory and work done in this area, along with the variety of approaches that could be taken with these questions. (Somehow the question felt too big, too daunting for my limited experience, my excitement withered) I became disheartened and determined that I needed to further reflect on my choice of topic.

From 'fear of the self', I turned to the idea of intuition in counselling. In the little window of time I had to myself at the end of a day filled with classes, readings, supper, baths, and bedtime stories, I took to bed with a book entitled, *Practical Intuition*³², by Laura Day. I began to consider the role of intuition in counselling. (How do we access it? How do we know if we've accessed it? What is it?) I began more searches, accumulated

numerous articles on intuition and began to read. I attempted to begin relying on my intuition more in my counselling sessions with clients and met with some success when I followed through on what I felt were intuitive hunches. (Was that it? That felt right..that went somewhere, but how do you know? how do you write about it? how do you talk about layers and levels of consciousness?) Yet the literature I was reading was telling me that intuition is an extremely difficult topic to discuss, primarily due to its intangibility, and although it can be present at any time, the literature seemed to suggest that it was largely dependent on years of experience in the field. (I began to feel like a fish out of water.) The topic was extremely interesting and immensely important, but I didn't feel as though I was ready to research it. (How can I talk and write about something meaningfully in a thesis, when I have yet enough experience of it myself? What am I thinking?)

It was mid-semester and I had just given up on another topic. Now what to do. I entered that bleak panicked state of feeling as though I'd gone down two different research avenues and had come out with nothing. I was at a loss as to where to turn next. (I felt helpless, frustrated, and dejected.) The course work was piling up, the practicum was going strong, and I needed to find a thesis topic to write a proposal. My supervisor, John Sumarah, suggested that I look at my own life history more closely, at the pattern and the themes that had pervaded it. The suggestion was daunting initially. There were things I did not wish to remember let alone write down. (Fear. Immediate fear and anxiety. I don't want to do this.) However, without any better ideas at the time and with an inner sense that this suggestion sounded like exactly what I needed to do, I committed to the process and spent a demanding week and a half, reliving and writing down, much of my own history.

I experienced anew, the pain, the despair, and the shame, which coloured much of my adolescence. (I lived with ache. But I committed to this. Go through this. Don't stop. Write everything.) And then I did the unthinkable. I handed it over to John to read. Needless to say, I trust my supervisor. What came from this experience, however, is quite remarkable, for the content of what I wrote became far less important than the act of disclosing it.

I reluctantly approached the building to meet him in his office, knowing that he'd read my life as I'd written it, (my heart was pounding in my chest and head, my stomach rolled and churned), I felt like being anywhere rather than where I was. I was so fearful, so ashamed, so vulnerable, having exposed myself so completely to another (he sees me...he really sees me.). Ironically however, in this act of self-disclosing, I became actively engaged in my healing. My exposure was met with admiration, acceptance, and great respect. I was able to consider my experience through the eyes of another, in such a way, as to suspend some of the judgement and see myself and my past as a culmination of a variety of circumstances. (It's okay...it's all okay...breathe) I at once began to consider what therapeutic healing is all about. It is relational, and dependent on certain inherent qualities in both the client and almost more importantly, the therapist/counsellor. For it is certain that self-confrontation and self-disclosure require not only great courage, but also the necessary precondition of a relationship founded in trust, acceptance, and mutual respect.

From this radical experience my questions shifted, from those pertaining to an individual's process in self-confrontation, to those of the conditions necessary in the therapeutic alliance to promote self-healing. Having sat across from John, feeling my

shame, my uncertainty, and my fear, I experienced anew what it is to be a client and trust another with my story. (such vulnerability...such transparency...such nakedness, shame and fear) With this also came a realization of how comfortable one could potentially become sitting in the therapist's chair always on the receiving end of another's disclosure. How much greater empathy could a counsellor have, if they too were actively engaged in the ongoing process of self-evaluating and self-disclosing?

look and listen for
the ache of alone
remember how it feels
vulnerability
to open up and expose
what is most difficult
to bring to light
feel it in your body
the discomfort
the ache
now
listen
again

Needless to say, one would hope that all good counsellors are constantly monitoring themselves and their reactions, and yet how often do they actually have the experiential component in their work of turning to another, professional or otherwise, to disclose their thoughts, concerns, fears, and shortcomings?

I began to consider, through my own self-evaluation in sessions, what it is that I choose to develop with a client. (who am I in this relationship? they are looking to me for answers, they are looking to me as a source of knowledge, of expertise...now what do I do?) A

client may come in, sit down, and proceed to share several paragraphs worth of personal content. As a good empathic counsellor using supportive skills, I may reflect, paraphrase, and attempt to clarify, what they have divulged. However, I may also notice a way in which a phrase is said, certain body language, an innuendo, a pattern, an underlying intended message, and I may choose to comment on this in the hopes of further development on the part of the client. What I am asking now, however, is from where does my choice arise? In other words, what is it that I am bringing to a counselling session that belongs to me, which I might inadvertently impose on a client through my choice of what I deem important to develop? Further, how can I ever completely detach myself from myself, to actually just be with a client and allow them to control the direction of the therapeutic process? (how can I be there and get out of the way at the same time?) My intuitive answer to the above is that I can't. I can't ever fully detach myself, and in fact what I bring is ultimately what makes my approach unique. Nevertheless, I am convinced that I am ethically obligated to ensure that I am in a continuous process of self-evaluation, to ensure that I am not imposing personal bias, or judgement, on clients. This evaluation must be undertaken both individually, as an internal monitoring, and with peers in an external dialogue. And so, in some respects, the questioning led me back to the self-confrontation of the individual, myself.

The therapist needs imagination and inner freedom to create skilful means to suit each situation, weaving all and any method into the work. To achieve such versatility we have to do something about ourselves, for it is we who get in our own way.
David Brazier³³

one of the fundamental questions really
is whose needs are being met?
am I here fulfilling my need of being needed?
my need to be appreciated? liked? accepted?
as you ask another to search for their resources
remember
we must search for our own

To see life as-it-is requires the sacrifice, at least temporarily, of both one's self-importance and one's preconceptions and prejudices. And for however long it lasts, there is nothing to replace what has been sacrificed. Only space.
David Boadella.³⁴

I became driven by the notion of presence. (What is therapeutic presence? How can we be most present with a client? How can I create space within myself to allow for space for another? What do I need to be engaged in within myself to be able to embody and allow for presence?) In my early experiences with clients in session I was often uncertain. (Am I saying too much? Did I miss the point? Did I really hear my client? Did I have an agenda? How do others do it?)

In speaking with my practicum supervisor about the self-evaluation practices of counsellors and therapists, he shared his opinion that very few engage in this practice of self-confrontation. I was shocked. "But why not?" I asked. "Because", he replied, "it is anxiety provoking." "Yes", I said, "so?" I realized that in my naiveté I had assumed that internal reflection on the part of a counsellor was accepted as an integral part of the counselling process. Apparently, it is not necessarily the case. Nor did I find in my training in the program that much emphasis was placed on the need for the beginning

counsellor to be engaged in an ongoing reflective process with regard to their assumptions and motivations.

I became compelled to seek out those professional counsellors who did engage regularly in this practice and ask them how they experienced it and how it impacted on their life and work. I wanted to know how they perceived the notion of therapeutic presence. I wanted to know what they perceived as the preconditions to be within themselves, to be able to be truly present with another. Further, I wanted to know what they drew on in session with a client. (Was it theory? Strategy? Personal experience? Grace? All of these combined?)

I had the notion that a phenomenological inquiry into their interior experiences would help me to better understand my own. I had my interview questions written, my system of methodological analysis in place, all that was left were the interviews themselves. (they'll be able to answer my questions..they've been doing this for far longer than I have) But this investigation never happened, I never did the interviews, and I changed the vision of my thesis yet again. Not because I didn't think it would be an extremely valuable and educative endeavour, but because I realized that I was yet again looking outside, looking to others to lead me, instead of turning within. If I am the one who is striving to understand herself in this counselling role, shouldn't my investigation be one which looks long and hard at my own assumptions, motivations, fears, and insights? For I have come to believe over time that helping another cannot be separated from doing something about myself. That is to say, the more able I am to know, understand, and accept myself, the more able I will be to offer the same to another. (but even though I

realized this, part of me still wanted to stay in the more comfortable arena of reporting findings, of relating what I'd been told by another) I was left with wondering if this self-study would appear self-indulgent; if my exploration would really benefit anyone else.(who am I to presume that I have anything of worth to offer in my limited experience? how can I presume to simply write about my own experience?) Nevertheless, in committing to this inner investigation, my hope is that my conviction that the turn within as an essential component in the formation of a counsellor, will become apparent.

self indulgent
or ethically responsible
what is this work?
yes I am exploring myself
my thoughts
my experiences
my questions
but
the process
in my humble opinion
is essential
for I am my own instrument
I have no scalpel
no curriculum
no lines to learn
I have but me
the more I explore
probe
question
my experience
my assumptions
my motivations
the better able am I
to understand
another
I can look
in books

for theories
of human nature
for stages
of psychological development
for modalities
of behaviour
but
I am
my primary source
and I believe
the better I know myself
the better
I can know
you
again I ask
self indulgent
or
ethically responsible?

What I am suggesting is that this process which I underwent in the search to uncover a topic for thesis research was in many ways, a search to discover and validate my voice of experience (have courage to speak, but speak clearly and with honesty). It was a process that led me to consider that perhaps my experience does matter and that my insights are what are going to lead and support me as I undertake my counselling practice. It is far easier to look to others for guidance as to what to write and how to write it, and far more difficult to undertake these questions of myself.

you've been exposed
to numerous theories
and multiple skills
now what do you do?
and who are you?

And so the evolution of the idea went from a desperate search outwards, to the relentless reading of the works of others, to the notion of interviewing others, to the source of the questions. Myself.

The wanderer seeks many ways. Sooner or later, she comes home.
Hexagram 56, I Ching.³⁵

My search for a thesis topic then, led me initially outwards where I came up against walls erected by topics that I knew not enough about, to an eventual inward search for understanding of myself, and my self-in-relation to the work of counselling. My questions became more and more honed until they pertained directly to myself and my role as counsellor. This inward journey of self-reflection is what led me to question my understanding of the counselling process. My turn inward became concurrently a turning outward in my need to manifest my understanding in the world through the work of counselling. This is to say that the inward journey always leads me back to myself and my need to reflect on my choices, while the outward turn is what I bring back to the work after reflection. Every client, every session, every moment, is a new beginning that warrants reflection.

The literature that has led me:

Thus far, I have attempted to introduce myself, my questions and my chosen format, and I would now like to introduce the traditions that have inspired and encouraged me. For this work is not merely a culmination of personal reflection, but also a reflection on my experience of reading the work and devotion of others. This section will be interspersed with personal reflections written from an inner voice that in my opinion reflect thematically on the literature reviewed.

what is a theory
but the organized
assumptions, ideas, conclusions
regarding a phenomenon
that had to originate
from an individual's
reflection

As long as I can remember, I have been drawn to books that explore the nature of self-development, spirituality, mysticism, and philosophy and this unyielding interest is what also fuels this present work. Much of what I have been reading of late has been within the realm of counselling and psychotherapy, but with a similar underlying interest. Theoretically, these areas are explored within the domains of: Humanistic and Transpersonal psychology; Spiritual psychotherapy; Zen Buddhist psychology; Existential and Phenomenological psychology; and Feminist Counselling. I will share with you what I have found to be the gifts of these traditions, for they have informed me, and have supported and encouraged my quest.

My interest in Humanistic and Transpersonal psychology lies in my interpretation of their respective orientations. Humanistic psychology, as I understand it, seems to orient itself toward a notion of the self as holistic, with an emphasis on growth and exploration of potential, emotional well-being, and interpersonal expression. When first exposed to the work of Carl Rogers, humanist psychologist and founder of client-centered therapy, I was deeply moved by his vision of the therapeutic process. His vision as I understand it, is that when a client, who is in a vulnerable and anxious state (due in large part to conditional acceptance from parents and other significant people), is met by a counsellor who is able to embody a congruent state (i.e., that the counsellor within the relationship is freely and deeply him (her) self) and that counsellor can experience unconditional positive regard (i.e., that the counsellor accepts with warmth each aspect of the client's experience as being a part of that client) and empathy (i.e., that the counsellor can sense the client's private world as if it were his or her own) for that client, the actualizing tendency of the client is promoted.³⁶

What I find most radical about Roger's approach is that in many respects it can be summed up in a single word: Love. Unconditional positive regard is truly about being in a place with one's self as a counsellor, that one can be free to offer to another the quality of acceptance that comes from being loved unconditionally. Love is radical, for it can move another to acknowledge within his or her self, the capacity to be worthy of love and acceptance. It is the beginning of learning to love one's self in many respects.

and where does love fit in?
can we speak of love?

or is it unprofessional?
not the hungry love that feeds the physical
not the questing love that feeds the ego
not the love that feeds at all
but the love that underlies
the love that unites
the love that defies
being described
by the single word
love
we are more than we seem
we defy our own descriptions

In the work of Carl Rogers I have found descriptions of a quality of experience that he describes in his work with which I resonate. He has beautifully articulated this in the following passage:

Life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process, in which nothing is fixed. In my clients and in myself I find that when life is richest and most rewarding it is a flowing process. To experience this is both fascinating and a little frightening. I find I am at my best when I can let the flow of my experience carry me, in a direction which appears to be forward, toward goals of which I am but dimly aware.
Carl Rogers³⁷

This flowing process of which he speaks is complex in its simplicity. For it is not simply, in my opinion, letting it just happen, but rather letting it happen with a discerning and experienced grasp of the nature of the process which occurs when two persons meet in dialogue. It is this process which compels me; the process of allowing the flow to be.

from a distance
it can look quite simple
they talk
you listen
but the air is full of colliding worlds
their thoughts
your reactions
their reactions to your reactions
your reaction to their reaction of your reactions
where you sit
(sit metaphorically)
you sit as gentle conductor
of the most important symphony
ever written

Referred to as the fourth force of psychology, Transpersonal psychology builds on the Humanistic approach with the additional notion of the possibility of peak and transcendent experiences (also called transpersonal, mystical, or spiritual), which suggest a transcendent level of reality. The word ‘transpersonal’ is derived from the Latin *trans*, meaning beyond or through, and *persona*, translated as mask. As such it is a psycho-spiritual orientation which strives to acknowledge and understand not only the traditional areas of psychological inquiry, but also, “altered states of consciousness, peak experiences, self-realization, meditation, and other techniques which transcend the more traditional limiting models of human potential.”³⁸ My interest in this approach relates directly to a personal intuition that I hold, that we are more than what we appear to be. All my past readings over the years in philosophy, religion, mythology, mysticism, have been my attempt to explore and understand my profound sense that we are connected and interconnected to something greater than ourselves. I was delighted, excited, and relieved, to come across the transpersonal orientation; in countless texts I was reading the

works of those who were committed to understanding and actualizing this aspect of ourselves.

Contributions to the transpersonal approach are far reaching. Many traditions have for centuries included spiritual dimensions to their disciplines, as evidenced in the contemplative schools of Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. Further West, there were the mystical Christians, the mystical Muslims, and the Sufis. In this century, there has been the work of William James in the 1900's, who "took reductionistic viewpoints about human behavior and consciousness and expanded them to include discussions of exceptional mental states and mystical experience."³⁹ His work, *Varieties of Religious Experience*⁴⁰, explores the possibility that our consciousness is actually a small part of a far greater consciousness, which in turn suggests that our awareness has the potential to access far more than we may conventionally accept.

Freud and Jung were also early contributors, as were Robert Assagioli and Abraham Maslow. More recently, Ken Wilber, has synthesized "diverse schools of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and religion, into a spectrum of transpersonal development that spans the full spectrum of human consciousness from infancy to enlightenment."^{41 42}

Transpersonal psychology focuses not only on issues of transcendence, but on the real fulfillment of human potential and the critical awareness and understanding of the "shadow" parts of the self (those parts which are either conscious or unconscious which contribute to an disintegrated state of self). Although many transpersonal interests may overlap with religious or sacred understandings, it is not to be mistaken as a religion.

Instead, "the transpersonal approach espouses no fixed creed or dogma, demands no particular religious convictions, and espouses an open-minded scientific, philosophical, and experiential testing of claims."⁴³

The assumption of transpersonal psychology then, is that not only do these experiences exist, but that they are also actually desirable as part of the process in the actualization of human potential. This orientation opens many doors when one stops to consider what self-actualization entails. If, as these writers suggest, we have the potential for an awareness which is far greater than we may conventionally accept, what does this imply for my practice as a counsellor and for the possible experiences my clients may share with me? It encourages me to remain open to anything that emerges, in me, and in my clients, as my understanding of what this reality is, is in constant process as I grow and experience.

we are more
than what we seem
you are more
than what you believe yourself to be
you
are beyond
your ability to think about yourself
for thought is language
and language is limited
but you
are
not

If the transpersonal orientation is focused on the sense of identity or self that extends beyond the individual to encompass wider aspects of human kind, life, psyche, or

cosmos⁴⁴, the existential-phenomenological tradition could be seen to be focused on the “concrete existence of the individual person and (the) attempt to elucidate the fundamental themes with which human beings invariably struggle.”⁴⁵ Although existentialism and phenomenology began as separate philosophical movements, they have merged somewhat over the last century as a psychological tradition. The field in itself is vast when one considers the philosophical contributions and the psychological and therapeutic manifestations of this tradition. My intention is not to attempt to summarize the field, but rather to delineate what I have come to understand as some of the central themes, along with a discussion of a few of its contributors who I have been drawn to in particular.

Fundamentally, what I understand as being the principle tenet of this tradition is the notion that individuals have an inherent drive toward individuation (self-actualization) which is actualized through the freedom to choose to act responsibly to shape one’s self and one’s environment in such a way that one’s innate potentials are being actualized. This does not imply that there is a fixed self-actualized state, but rather that individuals are in a constant process of being and becoming. The notion of authenticity relates to an individual’s ability to be open to experience, to accept the freedom of one’s fate, and to take responsibility for the development of one’s identity.

My reading in this area has been primarily in the work of Martin Buber and Rollo May, although I am also drawn to the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger who undoubtedly had tremendous influence on the psychological manifestation of what was initially a branch of philosophical inquiry.

Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch*, the "overman", suggests an individual who has courageously faced his/her limitations, and has taken the responsibility for his/her freedom. It is the notion of not avoiding, but meeting directly the pain and struggle of life, so as to attain an understanding of the inherent freedom and responsibility in our actions. Heidegger, meanwhile, offers an interpretation of the nature of our existence with his term *Dasein*. *Dasein*, translated as "Being-there", speaks of our intrinsic relatedness to that which is beyond ourselves, a relatedness that is not static, but in a continual process of becoming. Together, these two notions offer a framework of self-development, which is about the continual process of meeting the events of our life with sustained courage, to move towards our fulfillment in freedom.

we are always becoming
we are perpetual motion
even in stasis
we are in process
moving moving
toward that which beckons
a sense
a notion
a felt knowing
that there is something more
something that guides
something that urges
something that requires us
to embody the pain of our existence
and continue on

In the past century Martin Buber, a Jewish theologian and intellectual whose work influenced the existential-phenomenological tradition, has highly influenced the notion of

human relationship as the context for being and becoming.⁴⁶ This has obvious significance for the realm of counselling and psychotherapy. He conceived that human relationships fall into one of two categories: the “I-Thou” relationship or the “I-it” relationship. The fundamental difference between the two is the quality of the connection that is created. In my understanding, an “I-Thou” relationship is one in which the humanity of each party is not only respected, but also affirmed by the presence of the relationship. An “I-it” interaction, on the other hand, is one in which one party is being objectified by the other, and consequently, neither party is genuinely affirmed. It would seem that an “I-Thou” dynamic is precisely the necessary core of a therapeutic relationship; one in which the client is not diagnostically objectified, but instead, met with full respect as another human being.

I remind myself each time
each time I remind myself
this person before me
this person with whom I share this space
this person with whom I share this moment in time
is the most important person in the world
in this moment

Existential-phenomenological psychology seeks to understand the client not via the counsellor’s preferred therapeutic techniques, but rather as the client actually *is*. In other words, as a counsellor, instead of being “stuck” in a preferred paradigm into which you attempt to fit your client, instead, you first simply experience the client so as to

understand how they relate to themselves and the world and subsequently determine what technique is most appropriate.

I'm still not completely comfortable
with the term 'client'
it's better than 'patient'
but it still seems clinical
I can't help but think of them
simply
as
people

The role of the counsellor then, is to meet the client with authenticity and openness, both because it is what the client truly deserves, as well as the fact that it serves to model authentic human behaviour. The counsellor's role is to help to clarify for the client the choices, which they confront, to ultimately give the client a sense of their own power to choose. My interest in this approach is specifically that theory and technique are considered subsequently to the actual experiencing of the individual and hence the counsellor is then relying on one's subjective experiencing of the client. The assumption is that to meet a client with authenticity, a counsellor would have first had to carve out an authentic existence for him or herself.

and who am I to you?
and who am I to me?
can I ask you to turn and look within
if I am still looking without?
together we journey
and share the load

Much has been written on how counsellors should approach spiritual issues when they arise in the world of their clients, but far less has been written on the spiritual orientation of the counsellor and how this orientation is manifested. A notable exception to this is an article I discovered written by T.Byram Karasu, entitled simply, *Spiritual Psychotherapy*.⁴⁷ The overriding theme of the article is that spiritual therapy is not about what the spiritual therapist does, but more, what he/she *is*. It is his opinion that often too much attention is paid to the professional training of therapists and not enough to their personal formation exemplified by his statement that, "the therapist can help a patient grow only as much as he, himself, has grown."⁴⁸

Karasu's definition of a spiritual therapist, is reminiscent of the potentials of human growth outlined in the Transpersonal tradition:

..the spiritual therapist is one who must himself transcend into a universal consciousness, in order to practice psychotherapy that itself opts for such a higher state of consciousness and growth and that targets the spiritual center of man. That target is approached by fertilizing one's self with broad curiosity and engagement, by expanding interest while seeking informed simplicity, by anchoring the self within through solitude and without through intimacy, by belonging and believing, and finally, by grounding one's soul in the serenity of spirituality.
T. Byram Karasu⁴⁹

As such, Karasu seeks to challenge the diagnostically-based psychopathological labels, to instead suggest that it is only in the rising above of such dualities as normal-abnormal, sane-insane, that true experience of human frailty is accessed. In his own words:

*The spiritual therapist does not treat an illness, or try to cure a person who has an ailment; instead he remains with a person who is in the process of becoming.*⁵⁰

I reach
I reach to reach me
I reach to reach you
I reach to reach
what is

In my explorations I have also found that there is great wisdom to be found in the Zen Buddhist tradition of psychotherapy, whether or not one commits to it as a tradition or religious orientation. In his work, *Zen Therapy: Transcending the Sorrows of the Human Mind*⁵¹, David Brazier, a Western psychotherapist and Zen Buddhist, demonstrates the therapeutic potential of a Buddhist approach towards a practical path to personal growth. Although he offers a detailed exploration into the fundamentals of Buddhist psychology, what was of most personal interest was his discussion around the skills necessary for a therapist to practice effectively. This effectiveness, he suggests, is a result of a therapist's ability to overcome self-centered concern, to overcome self-destructive patterns of habit, to live in the present free from preoccupation with the past and future, and ultimately, to be committed to one's own spiritual progress. Commitment to these principles, he proposes, is what allows the therapist to create a safe space within which a client can undertake a process of self-examination. In his words:

*..the sacred work must be created beginning with the therapist's surrender of self-concern. Zen begins with the emptying of the therapist.*⁵²

Brazier's approach is one of mindfulness, being mindful of what it is that one is experiencing in the present moment. If the present moment is not lived fully, then an opportunity has been lost which will never return. It seems to me that this orientation, this letting go, allowing, and surrendering to the moment, is the essence of the healing therapeutic encounter. It does not mean that as a therapist one merely sits passively in the moment, allowing things to happen. Quite the contrary, in my opinion, being mindful to the moment is being open to the flow of events within the world of the client, in one's own world, and in the mutually shared world of client and counsellor. It is the flow which allows the synthesis of insight and intuition to come forth within the being of the counsellor; a marriage of learned theory, and technique, with the wisdom of lived experience and intuitive grasp, woven together with faith in the unending process self discovery.

the Eastern sages say
that now is all there is
right here right now
right now as you read this
be here
right here
listen
to your own silence

It has been quite recently that I have become more comfortable with the use of the word “feminism”. I shyed away from its use, uncertain of what it implied, uncertain of what it meant to me to be a woman. Beginning from childhood, the majority of positive role models in my life have been men (my father, my four brothers, a therapist, and several professors). My quest to understand myself has been intrinsically linked to my ongoing awareness and analysis of the roles and expectations placed on women in our society. I have both bought into these expectations, and later turned radically rejecting them and parts of myself. Feminism to me, meant that I had to take myself seriously as a woman, become political, radical. I wasn't sure that I was ready to commit to the work of the reintegration of parts of myself that I had come to deny and fear.

This stance has mellowed of late, partly because I have allowed myself to explore deeply many of the themes of my life and recognize how much of what I was denying was a result of my initial acceptance of a role that wasn't chosen by me.

are you beginning to realize that it wasn't all your fault?
that the script you were following was written by another?
that the role you were playing was left unchallenged by those that led you?
that your waywardness, your confusion, your impulsivity
was your outrage trying to find an outlet?

moving away from the role
is like moving away from your self
the only self you've been taught
moving away from the role
is like floundering in nowhere-ness
certainly no man's land

going towards something
for which there is no prototype
creating and recreating

day by day
stumbling reaching
towards an incarnation
as yet unrevealed

and it makes you angry
more than you even realize
that ambiguous rage that simmers beneath
rearing its head as it attacks you
from the inside out

and you can blame history
and you can blame society
and you can blame your mother
but all the while
you're standing still
blaming

or you can in your womanly way
forgive
in the best sense
and move

As I have turned to the work of feminist counsellors, I have found a haven where I least expected it. In the writing of Jocelyn Chaplin, I have read metaphors for life and the work of counselling which I myself have written about long prior to reading her work. The notion that our life is not moving up a hierarchical ladder in a linear way, but rather moves in a spiralling motion back wards and forwards through cycles of development⁵³, is one which I intuitively hold. Further, my understanding of feminist counselling is that it stresses the interconnectedness and interrelatedness between different and often opposite sides of our life and ourselves.⁵⁴ In this regard it seeks to deconstruct the hierarchical adherence to the polarity of opposites: one is either weak or strong, well or sick, passive or active, angry or compassionate. Instead, as human beings we can be seen

to be in process and able to contain within ourselves, a full range of emotions. As such, feminist counselling seeks to address the whole person, and not simply one behavioural 'problem' that the client presents.

What does this mean for the person of the feminist counsellor? Feminist counsellors are engaged in a commitment to analyze and transform "hierarchical relationships into more egalitarian ones, whether these be in society at large or in the consulting room."⁵⁵ The client-counsellor relationship is also a power relationship, people come to counselling in a state to seek support and advice from another. This perception of the counsellor, by the client, as the support and advice giver, sets up a power dynamic and an internal hierarchy. The role of the feminist counsellor, however, is not to advise necessarily, but rather to support and enable the client in her self-exploration. In this respect, the counsellor is not superior to the client, but rather, an accompanier on the client's journey, there to contain and support this process.

The feminist approach to counselling, which I came to late in my beginning year, is empowering for me as I tend to believe that I have been using in my own practice, many of the principles upheld by this approach.

Feminist
is a word
that I have looked at
from the outside
and felt afraid
felt unsure
of the responsibility
it demands

Feminist

when looked at from the inside
I realize
is natural
is simply
restabilizing
the balance

but my Father's grasp is strong
his voice is compelling
while my Mother's remains quiet
scared and embittered
and I feel for Her
and try to reach out
in a way that She can accept

and I realize that part of my journey
part of my struggle
has been in reconciling
that as I grow, expand
I leave Her behind
I abandon Her in some way
and become even more
something against which
She contrasts herself
and comes up short

and so for years
I stayed behind with Her
in the shadow
not reveling in my successes
but pointing out my shortcomings
not enjoying my spirit
but condemning my body
not living in the moment
but reliving the past
and fighting to control the future
not connecting
but critiquing

my essential humanness
is larger far larger
than me being a woman
but woman I am
my wisdom
my way

my cycles and rhythms
can connect me with woman

woman as woman
woman as creator of life
woman as earth
woman as cycle
woman as process
woman as unfolding in time
woman as patience
woman as compassion
woman as strength
woman as Earth
woman as wisdom

deep reaching wisdom
through the soles of my feet
into the roots
that connect me
with the centre
of the All

hallelujah

These traditions which I have explored, albeit briefly, serve to illustrate the elements to which I am drawn in my questioning regarding the work of the counselling, and the work of the counsellor. If I were to offer a composite theory of counselling, based on these traditions and my personal reflections, it would look something like this:

Counselling is the work of allowing a client to meet him/herself in an environment that is non-judgemental, supportive, and safe. A client may enter counselling in an anxious state, with conditioned ideas regarding who he or she is as a result of cultural/familial conditioning. These conditioned ideas require challenging at a time discerned by the counsellor as most effective. A client is a human being, not a

'problem' which requires fixing, and within him/herself, possesses an innate drive towards wholeness and well-being. This actualizing tendency is only limited by our perceptions of the limits of human growth, and therefore each client deserves to be met with openness and curiosity as to his or her views of personal potential.

Dear Client

I can't promise that I'll take it all away, although there are times that I wish I could. I can't promise that I'll make you feel better, because at times you may feel worse. I can't promise that I won't impose my experience on you although I'll do my best not to.

I can promise that I will meet you as a person, not as a problem. I can promise that I will do my best to help you feel heard. I can promise that I will treat your experience with the respect it deserves. I can promise that I will do my best not to assume I understand until I have asked you to help me to. I can promise that I will do my utmost to help you to see for yourself that you are truly amazing.

For the counsellor, the work is to know oneself and be accepting of oneself to the degree that one can manifest congruency and be present with a client. This congruent state of acceptance allows the counsellor to both model authentic human behaviour, and display genuine acceptance for the client in all his or her aspects. Further, what is required of the counsellor is an ability to suspend control of the situation to the degree that it models the flowing process of real life. This ability is founded on the counsellor's degree of trust and faith in him/herself, in the client, and in the wisdom of the process.

Although simplistic, this composite serves to illustrate how I view the counselling process and the role of the counsellor at this present stage in my formation. Nevertheless,

I am still left with numerous questions as to how to manifest this quality of work in my own practice:

How can I best help another to help him or herself? What do I need to be working on within myself so to be most present with another? What is the nature of therapeutic presence? How can I meet another in such a way that I am supporting growth and not enabling dependence? How can I be most authentic with myself and another? How should I deal with my uncertainties, fears, and trepidations, in the taking on of this privilege of listening to and witnessing the life of another?

In the pages that follow, I will reflect on my experience in practice at times using examples from work with clients, exploring these questions as they have arisen. My aim is to better understand myself, but always in the pursuit of understanding my self-in-relation to my practice. As already mentioned, what follows will be an investigation with layers of voice: the academic voice presented in this font, 'Times Roman'; the inner voice presented in this font 'Perpetua'; and the voices of those that have led me *will be italicized*.

I.
as the weeks wore on
and I learned more and more in my classes
cognitive restructuring
empty chair
guided imagery
the basic id
my anxiety level grew
what to use when
and with whom
my mind became cluttered in session
I couldn't listen as well
for I was too busy thinking
about strategy

II.
I wanted unconscious
competence
here and now
the ability to flow
and know
what to use
and when to use it
without really having to think
about it
my impatience
to have it all
and to have it all now
robs me
of the pleasure of the process

III.
after living with the anxiety
(my feelings of uncertainty
about what to use and when to use it)
talking about it
complaining about it
wrestling with it
I kind of
gave up
gave in
and went back to listening
(a watched pot never boils)

Turning within:

I want to begin with what may seem to be a simple question: Why do people seek counselling? Although the immediate answer may seem obvious, i.e., people seek counselling to alleviate distress, to explore options, to simply be heard by another, I can't help but feel that the initial question cannot be separated from a consideration of the context in which we live in today's society. I am often alarmed at the world in which we live, where the new technologies which have the potential to be of great service to humanity, also serve to alienate and distance us from our relationships to ourselves and our planet. The engaging act of speaking directly with another is quickly being replaced by the convenience of email, ICQ, faxes, and other distancing forms of communication. The break down of family, of community, of the influence of organized religion, has left many people in an external search for greater prestige, more wealth, and more power. The soul that historically turned to God, turns outward into a chaotic hegemony of artificiality in this culture. The ideals propagated by much of mass media are unrealistic and grounded in a consumeristic plot to keep people on an external search for inner peace. Both men and women from an early age are taught by our culture's values that success looks like the beautiful people in the entertainment industry, who adorn the covers of slick magazines and billboards. The message sent is one that puts immense pressure on people to attempt to acquire the perfect body, smile, car, job, house, and partner.

In this unhealthy environment not only can we end up feeling unaccepted by our culture's ideals, we are so immersed in the message that we can end up feeling

unacceptable to ourselves. The sense of inner emptiness that this environment creates, then becomes a void in need of being filled. Running faster and harder to escape the pain of our loneliness and lack of real connection, the void takes hold and becomes our dirty secret, as we scramble to find ways to fill it. The filling of this sense of emptiness can become obsessive and a way of coping with the anxiety of our aloneness. We turn to the many methods available and often condoned by our modern society: drinking, casual sex, smoking, drug use, shopping, eating, obsessive exercise. Soon we are no longer the subject in our lives, but rather our method of coping takes precedence, and we run around it trying to allay the inevitable confrontation with our unhappiness and ourselves.

an overweight girl
riddled with teenage acne and angst
scans the glossy covers of fashion magazines
as she waits in line to pay for her Huggen Daz
consumed with self-loathing
she focuses on the bare abdomen
in a computer enhanced photo
of an underweight model
how desperately sad are our times?

So much energy can be expended in maintaining the illusion of being someone that we are not. We can become hooked in story-lines that block us from seeing our own patterns and from the healing that self-responsibility can bring. I had the occasion of working with a client for just one session, who amazed me with the degree to which she had perfected her constructed self.

I was amazed at how calmly you accepted and described
your deception
your whole life in every manifestation
was carefully constructed
to only reveal a manufactured perfection
and I was amazed
that no matter what I said
you had a counter
a reason to support your constructed
status quo

so far away from your pain
so far away from touching the source
you spoke with detached precision

beautiful outwardly
you orchestrated it all
so that no one ever knew
could ever guess
that everything was falling apart around you
and within you

but the priority
was the appearance
you didn't come looking for help
but rather to debate
why you were justified
in hiding yourself
in maintaining the ruse
playing games with yourself
and everyone else

and I challenged you gently
and was left defeated
and I probed
and was left helpless
and I made suggestions
and you shot them down
and when the hour was up
you stood
shook my hand
and thanked me
perfectly

Sometimes I believe that the notion of change is so terrifying we use all of our energy to maintain a status quo. No matter how painful or difficult it is to support, the outward persona is maintained at all costs so to uphold the external expectations that have been internalized. To surrender would mean death; the death of a way of being that has allayed the confrontation of self.

Life is a series of deaths and rebirths. You outgrow patterns, you outgrow people, you outgrow work. But if you are frightened and don't have a flexible personality, when you have to face the death of what you've always known, you are pitched into terror.
Marion Woodman⁵⁶

we each have a space
a space deep inside
which is ours alone
no one can touch it
not if we don't want them to
we can guard it
put up walls
barriers
barricades
fence it in
protect it
hide it
keep it in the dark
with
no breezes to blow
no music to hear
no sunshine to feel
safe
like a small child
crouched
in a corner

begin to pry
at the barricade

one nail at a time
carefully
methodically
pulling off the layers
to reveal
the source
the goodness
the tenderness
the love
that has been afraid
to come out
and
shine

I have searched for the voice in our culture, the voice that rings out over the melée saying there is more to life than the eternal escape of the present. I have listened for its song, its whisper, its shout, but when it rises up, it is often silenced by the power of the status quo. Who are our society's gurus, saints, and saviours? I have looked for them, but I have found little to encourage me that there is anyone with any real power in today's society saying, "look within, your strength is there, breathe deeply and be still."

Although the manifestations of trouble are myriad, all clients want to restore self-control and rediscover confidence and peace of mind: inner calm.
David Brazier⁵⁷

Perhaps people enter counselling because they become aware that they are living with a contradiction on some level. That on the one hand, they possess the inner wisdom that seeks to change their situation, while on the other, they remain caught in a pattern of seeking inner peace through outward escape. This wisdom which brought them to counselling, is in my opinion, the drive towards wholeness. This wisdom is that which

will push someone to do the unthinkable and expose him/herself. This exposure, this self-disclosure, is what I describe as the turn within. It is the willful act of choosing to grow through pain.

As I related earlier in the evolution of my thesis topic, it was this turn that I chose to make when I committed to revealing myself as completely as possible to another. This act of revealing, of self-confronting, is the path towards an understanding of oneself that strives to question and challenge our internalized perceptions of ourselves. The fruit of this decision, are the details which I share in this work. Only through meeting ourselves directly can we grow past where we presently reside.

Have you ever tried to tell someone something that you've been embarrassed to admit? Something that made you feel ashamed that you had done? I have. Can you remember the discomfort it caused, the uneasiness, the fear, when you were thinking about actually confiding your embarrassment in another? You had to trust them and take the risk that they might judge what you were saying...that they might think less of you...that they might not understand why you did it...that they might wonder just what kind of person you actually are. Do you remember that feeling? How your stomach feels uneasy, your chest tightens, your heart beats more rapidly...and you think maybe you shouldn't say anything...maybe it would be easier to just try to forget about the

whole thing and pretend that there's nothing wrong. But something inside, your voice of reason, your conscience, your need to be real, pushes you to do the unthinkable and expose yourself.

This experience I have just described, I consider precious, for in engaging with it from my own understanding, in an emotionally and almost physical way, it makes it possible to further engage, empathize, and connect with the world of another. It allows me to remember and to revisit within myself how it feels when I'm choosing to let in another. The details are different, but the emotional content is human. As a counsellor, I am separate and distinct from my client; however to truly experience my client's subjectivity, I am required to use the powers of my sensitivity and imagination to conjure up most vividly what my client experiences. This empathic resonance allows me the possibility of entering into the world of my client, while still maintaining a connection with my own. My work is to reach from my experience to grasp an experiential understanding of my client's world.

I launch myself into the relationship having a hypothesis, or a faith, that my liking, my confidence, and my understanding of the other person's inner world, will lead to a significant process of becoming. I enter the relationship not as a scientist, nor as a physician who can accurately diagnose and cure, but as a person, entering into a personal relationship. Insofar as I see him only as an object, the client will tend to become only an object.

-Carl Rogers.⁵⁸

... Insofar as I see him only as an object, the client will tend to become only an object...

An obvious enough statement, however I would like to explore further this notion of what it means to make a client an object; what is going on in the counsellor when this quality occurs? How can I ensure that my client remains subject? What is required of me?

An example:

(This is in no way a verbatim transcript, but rather a recollection of a session annotated to highlight its tension.)

There was one client in particular that I found extremely difficult to work with. I'll admit that I didn't look forward to seeing her, which is highly unusual for me. At first I couldn't figure out why. She always sat stiffly, her legs crossed, her fashionable high-heeled boots shiny. She'd frequently smooth her hair, and then return her hands to her lap. There was always a blankness in her eyes of some sort, like she was there but wasn't ready to be. Statement of the problem: She was having difficulty with her boyfriend, she didn't trust him, and she didn't like being alone. Anytime she wasn't with him, she was wondering who he was with, or what girl might be coming on to him. She claimed that she wanted to be carefree and spontaneous, but she wasn't.

"I don't know what to do. What should I do?"

Her eyes pleading, she looks at me hopefully. The air in the room is suffocating. My chest feels tight. I feel on the spot. What should I tell her? I don't have the answer. I feel her desperation and her

skepticism in my ability...or am I projecting that? I don't know. I ask her:

“What are you proud of about yourself?”

“I don't know.”

“What do you do well?”

“I don't know.”

“What do you like to do in your free time?”

“I don't know.”

Silence. Irrepressible silence. Silence that ached for closure of some kind. I squirmed inwardly.

“You seem to be really uncomfortable with how you're feeling, like there is a distance between where you are and where you'd like to be. So the question is : how do you move from where you are to where you would like to be? (“I don't know”). My feeling is that you need to learn to spend more time alone...find things that you can do when you're on your own that you enjoy and make you feel good about yourself. This is really what life demands of us..that we learn to enjoy our own company so that our emotional state isn't dependent on the presence of another person.”

I hear myself speaking...what am I saying? I sound like a teacher, like a judge, like a preacher. She looks at me blankly, but nods and smiles hesitantly to indicate that she has heard me. She is unconvinced, in my opinion, and I am frustrated. I have never glanced at the clock so many times in one session and never have the hands of time moved so slowly.

I would reflect afterwards and feel that I had done too much talking. I always found the sessions extremely awkward. After the

second session I decided that I would stop talking in the silences..that I wouldn't fill them to make myself feel better. In our third, and what ended up being our final session together, I commented on what she offered and then remained quiet. The minutes dragged on for what seemed like hours. It was probably my most uncomfortable experience to date. In later reflection I realized that she was uncomfortable with her own silence and her expectation was really that I would give her the answers. I refused to. She never returned although she had booked another appointment. I feel uncertain about my work with this client, I don't know what I could have done differently but I don't think that it was a good experience for her. Nevertheless, I did recognize that a large part of my discomfort was due to the fact that she truly placed me in the expert's role and was looking for me to fix how she felt. When I wouldn't rise to the occasion, she didn't return.

Was this client subject or object? My feeling is, in further reflection, that sometimes our clients aren't subjects to themselves and they require our meeting them as such to draw this state out of them. But I got hooked with this client, hooked by her needing me to be the expert and provide her with guidance, and I jumped in with both feet at first. My anxiety propelled me to fill the silence, to tell her something, anything. But in that moment, who was I helping? who was I soothing? Really only myself. *I* was the subject telling her what *I* thought she needed to do based on *my* experience. I made her the object. So perhaps I felt better in the short term. Perhaps she felt better in the short term. But what did she really take away from this experience when the next time she is

confronted with herself and her anxiety? Not much except for the memory of me telling her what she should do. And if she should fail at my recommendation? Then I would be one more person reinforcing her already existing feelings of self-inefficacy. Instead of working to enter her world, I tried to make her fit into mine.

I can only go so far with you
as I have been willing to go with myself
my expectations, assumptions, insecurities
my need to control what occurs
cannot but limit
the potential of what could arise
in me
in you
in us

Authentic dialogue presumes that both participants make themselves vulnerable and available. When one party remains distant and aloof, openness is inhibited.
Sidney Jourard⁵⁹

I now ask myself what I could have done differently. Had I spoken of my discomfort, my sense that she was looking to me for her answers, would I not have entered more authentically into a relationship based upon respect? In exposing myself, instead of assuming the role of the expert, would I not have allowed for more room for her to rise and meet me as a subject?

When a student begins to study the behavioural sciences, he or she naturally learns to look at people's problems objectively. And just as naturally the student begins to look at people objectively, too: There's me (the subject) studying people (the objects). Perhaps it

is necessary to go through this, but it is deeply frightening. It is frightening because you begin with a feeling of empathic sensitivity to the suffering of others, and then, while you're trying to learn how to ease that suffering you find out that you are distancing yourself from the humanity of those very people. And usually this distancing and objectification grow into a desire for personal gratification - I want to be a good therapist... I want to be able to effect change in these people. At this point, the people become things you wish to fix.

Gerald May⁶⁰

How easy is it to fall into this trap? This trap of wanting to 'fix' another. I am woman, am I not? I am Nurturer, Mother, Care Giver, Soother, am I not here to take the pain away? Yet in fulfilling this role, I serve no one but myself. Every time I take away another's pain, I rob him or her of the experience of learning how to do this for him or herself. Every time I seek to 'fix' another, I meet them as an object. This can only serve to enable a client to remain static and disengaged from any real self-dialogue. What are my motivations, I ask myself again. My motivation is to enable another in his or her pursuit of autonomy and self-reliance.

For one thing, I've learned that there is a difference between healing and fixing. If I try to fix the person that I see before me, I am embarking on a path that will lead both of us into ever-increasing separation and alienation. But if I can blink my eyes and see what's there, and quit thinking about it, then there may be some space for healing to occur. For healing is not something I do to someone else, nor is it something one does to oneself; rather it is a process within us, happening -just happening- if we can get out of its way.

Gerald May⁶¹

..but if I can blink my eyes and see what's there, and quit thinking about it, then there may be some space for healing to occur...

Buber described the human world as falling into two dimensions. He defined these two dimensions linguistically as the realm of the I-Thou relationship and the realm of the I-it interaction. For Buber there is no I without the second term in a fundamental pairing: "I-Thou" or "I-it". When a human being says "Thou" (or "you" in an intimate sense) he is entering an intimate encounter that transforms oneself as well. The "I" that an individual experiences himself or herself to be is shaped by the mode of connection with the second term in the pairing. When a human being addresses a Thou, this individual enters the realm of presence and encounter.

Donald Moss⁶²

Following this notion of Buber's, our notion of self or "I" is dependent on the quality of relationship we enter into with another. We always have a choice, in that our relationship can possess the quality of an "I-it" (where the other becomes object), or "I-Thou" (where the other becomes subject). Our experience of ourself and of the relationship, is dependent and shaped by the quality of the connection which we choose to pursue. If I choose to enter a relationship with the intention of "fixing" another, I have made that person an "it", an object to be fixed. When I choose to enter into a connection based on the quality of "I-Thou", I have chosen to enter the realm of "presence and encounter".

The question that arises in me at this point, is how do I do this? How can I ensure that I am treating another as a "Thou", or a subject, and hence allowing for real encounter? What are the necessary preconditions in the "I" required to address another as a "Thou"? My sense is that to be able to participate with another in an "I-Thou" relationship, I need to cultivate for myself, an "I-Thou" relationship within.

The cultivation of this quality of relationship within myself is an ongoing journey which requires me to be vigilant in my facing of fears and insecurities and my willingness to work through them. This, I believe, is the path of working to embody my

true potential. Further, if the goal of therapy is to facilitate the growth of an individual towards the fulfillment of his or her potential does it not follow that a counsellor able to facilitate this growth in another would be one who was engaged in this same process for him or herself? It would seem that a cultivation of these potentials is what might allow a counsellor to be with the unfolding process of the other, allowing for real empathy and presence.

Presence, as I understand it, is not simply being open to a client, or being empty of reactions. It is about openness, but openness both to what occurs in myself and in another. In a sense it is the ability to hold within myself all the experience I have of living: my self-deception, my dependency, my lust, my confusion, my sadness, my joy, my frustration, my angst, my love, my compassion. My experience of all these conflicting emotions can allow me, I think, to express a certain acceptance and openness to the client's world. This may occur verbally or non-verbally. My ability to simply be present and as fully me as I can be with another, may allow them the experience of this possibility in themselves.

we meet
my voice meets your voice
and in that space
creativity happens
and a third voice
emerges

The counsellor can act as 'container' for the client's feelings while she is still unfamiliar with them. All the counsellor does is to sit and listen. While feelings are still scary or

threatening for the client, the counsellor's presence may be needed to reassure her that all the feelings, and all the sides of herself, are acceptable. By listening non-judgementally, the counsellor is containing the client's feelings. Later on, as she gains confidence, the client will be able to contain her own feelings and watch and name them for herself as she goes through life. If the counsellor fully accepts the feelings, then so can the client.

Jocelyn Chaplin.⁶³

For a counsellor to be able to contain a client's feelings in a genuine way, he or she is required to learn to contain his or her own feelings of discomfort and unease. My personal experience is that this takes a tremendous amount of courage, commitment, and honesty, to learn to accept myself. I have experienced what it is to live with suppressed emotions and desires, the kind of duplicitous dynamic that colours a life afraid of freedom. I have experienced what it is to live with self-loathing, to feel as though I have hit the bottom of my being. My experience, my journey, is a gift.

My journey has travelled a long, circuitous, and winding road. There was often darkness, and I stumbled falling again and again and again. A blind search, scrambling outside myself for something, anything to grasp on to. But whenever I thought I had it, it would slip soundlessly through my fingers and I would stand in shocked disbelief that once again I had lost it. I would run faster, harder, more panicked, searching, searching, searching, for some small shred of comfort. Deeper and deeper I spiralled, down into darkness, down into what seemed to be a pit in my

own being where I deserved to lie. The intensity of pain was so great that all my efforts were bent on numbing my senses.

Numbing my spirit because it hurt too much to let myself simply feel. Again and again I trusted blindly, opening up to those who only knew how to take and not give. Black and blue from the inside out, I beat up my insides believing all that was said.

I didn't think I would make it. I thought that my lifestyle would get the better of me. I imagined my funeral, seeing it from above, hovering at the back of the church. There was no emoting, no weeping and wailing. It was just all over. All done. It seemed so simple.

So what happened, you ask. How is it that you are here now, doing what you do? And I have no clear answer. But the strength with which I hurled myself down, again and again, was the same strength that I began to use to pick myself up again and again. It was almost as if I had sunk so low there was nowhere else to go. I grew tired of the shadow, of the darkness that hung over me. I had to begin. Again.

Slowly, ever so slowly and tentively, I began to shed the dark. Like a seed trapped under ground in the blackness of the earth, I pushed and pushed against my shell. Daring it to crack, to let in just a little. I pushed against the great weight of the soil,

struggling, straining toward the light of day. Push push push push
push push harder harder the last push is the hardest...it gave.

The warmth cascaded down in yellow light from the sun
through the top of head down my spine through my limbs and out
the soles of my feet to connect with the earth's core. I was a
walking beam of light. I began sending light out to others in waves
as I rode the subway, or walked the city streets. It was about
forgiveness and the finding of true connection.

Remnants of the shadow still exist. I still fight its power
to make me feel small, diminished, worthless. It is pervasive, the
darkness; subtle, stealthy, sneaky in its methods. However, it's as
if the darkness only resides on the insides of my rib cage, but my
chest cavity is filled with yellow light. At times it's as if the
darkness never happened, that it belongs to another time, another
life. And I suppose that that is in part true, for my life now is not
what it was. Yet, who I am now, is someone who wears the
experience of that pain, that struggle, in her bones. Just beneath
the surface of my skin, my bones are engraved with stories, stories
that never let me forget.

..stories that never let me forget ...what? Stories that never let me forget that I am the
protagonist of this process, and that I have experience of the deepest, darkest place within
myself. This place and the agony that colours it, is with me eternally. I bless its presence

for it allows me to pause and reach in deeply to experience and remember the despair which we can all feel at times, particularly when we feel desperate enough to take the courageous act of confiding it in another. My relationship with this aspect of myself allows me to resonate with a client as he or she summons the courage to let it out and let me in. This aspect of my experience colours my understanding of my notion of my self-in-relation to the work of counselling, for my inner experience of angst and isolation can serve to connect me with the intensity of this emotion as it is shared by a client.

I want to say
thank you
to all that have passed
intertwined
blessed bruised
and
beaten
my path
..for you are all here

Unless we have examined our own follies and cried our own tears for them, we will not have the confidence which will enable us to accompany the client through their dark valley.

David Brazier⁶⁴

During my practicum, in this my beginning year as a counsellor, I experienced what any counsellor no matter how seasoned, I'm sure never hopes to experience. No amount of supervision could alleviate the feeling of aloneness I felt when I was faced with the responsibility of helping another to choose life. One of my clients, that I had been seeing for a period of approximately six weeks, attempted to take her life.

Since the evolutionary purpose of fear is to avoid pain, we should not be surprised that if a person experiences constant, intense pain, the fear of death begins to lose its sting, with death viewed as the only escape from pain.
Rush W. Dozier, Jr.⁶⁵

suicide girl

I got the call that morning
you had tried to take your life
last night
and were asking for me
shock
oh my God
what should I do
panic
breathe
calm
okay
breathe
to the hospital
I drove
uncertain
of what I'd find
of what I'd say
but knew
that I'd say something
you weren't there
they sent you home
already discharged
and my expectation
my anxiety
was displaced

you came to see me
that same day
apologizing
deeply apologizing
and I said

it's okay

but still
I wasn't sure
what to say
what to do
who to ask
and so
you and I talked
about what happened
you were serious
you wanted to die
you were angry
that you'd failed at that too
you showed me the cuts
embarrassed
ashamed
deep angry cuts
vertically
because it would bleed more
but you couldn't cut deeply enough
and so you took pills
but you didn't have enough
and so
you told someone
because you didn't want them to have to
look after you
but that's what we were all doing

I had seen you that day
the day that you did it
you said you were going to buy groceries
tunafish, I think
slightly dishevelled
wearing dark sunglasses
looking a little eccentric
which is your charm
you smiled and said
have a great day
now you tell me
you weren't buying groceries
but sharper blades

and I ask myself
could I have known?

was there something I wasn't seeing?
why I had to become
someone you felt you had to deceive?
what was my part?

you told me that
this wasn't over
that you were going to do it again
better next time
so it worked
but not quite yet
you'd caused everyone too much grief
to do it again so soon
I had to believe you
what else could I do?
if I made you write a contract
I'd be one more person
telling you what to do
not believing in your ability
to look after yourself
which was a large part of the problem

an appointment was booked
in two days time
and I told you
that I would
be calling you
in the meantime
just to
touch
base

but how difficult for me
to let you go
to know that
I had no control
no control
whatsoever
to keep you alive
to help you to see
that no matter what
your life is worth living

you were 21
an 'adult'

and I am bound
to my commitment
of confidentiality
but in no way
would you consider
telling your parents
the source of your grief
who live at the end
of a long distance call
too far to come
not that you would ask

but here I am again
at home
that evening
reeling with the responsibility
reeling with the trust
the sacred trust that had been put in me
to hold this story
and if anything happened?
and the parents had not been told?
what then?
and if it had been my child?
who though adult in years
was not adult in spirit
and I had not been told?
what then?

I was not alone
I spoke with my supervisors
I spoke with my partner
I spoke with my colleagues
until I was speaking too much
this was draining me
encompassing me
obliterating me
because
although I spoke
and was reassured
and supported
still
my decisions
were mine
my words
were mine

my actions
were mine
and for the first time
it struck me deeply

how alone I was

it was a thick week
thick with anxiety
with care
with concern
with discernments
I reflected on our time together
the time we had spent
up until that night
and with honesty
I can say
that I don't think
I could have done it differently
that even though
you went as far as you did
I was one person
the only person
that you had begun to let in
that with everything I knew
I had done all that I could
and could not take responsibility
for your decision
I cared deeply
but I couldn't blame myself
and so I didn't

touching
in a truly bizarre way
was reading
the suicide note
you left for me
given to me
with your journals
your blades
your pills
by your dear concerned friend

I didn't read your journals
they weren't mine to read

and when you asked for them back
I gave them willingly
but not the blades

you shared something with your mother
a part of it
not all of it
but enough
for anxiety
to rise anew
phone calls
from parents
to me
to you
and we were both in it
together
and I always respected you
your trust
and never said anything
without asking you first

and slowly
slowly
the anxiety passed
medication was started
reluctantly
and you spoke of the future
of the summer
of next year
of wanting
to keep seeing me

and I said yes
for the work is deep
and the work is long
and the work has yet
to be really
touched

and I need to grow
and you need to grow
to know where to start

you've left for the summer
at home now

unwilling to seek help
even though I have strongly encouraged you
your reply
I am special
unique
that you can only talk to me
and I hear dependence
and proceed carefully

Did I do alright? Could I have done better? Could someone else have seen the danger? the signs? the clues? I can't know, I won't ever know, for I could never describe everything that occurred between us to another to determine if there was something else I could have done. I am inexperienced in this, and I relied on all that I knew to date. But the anxiety. The anxiety that coloured that period was thick.

intangibility
ambiguity
cause deep anxiety
we desire and like control
order, simplicity
yet ultimately
our existence
is beyond our comprehension
we can fight
or surrender

This girl, who was in years a young woman, but still a girl, penetrated into my psyche, into my breath, into my life. Although I had encouraged her to begin to try to pry open the area within her that she kept so guarded, to begin to let in even in the slightest way, the people and friends in her life that cared for her, she could not. Only with me had

she begun to let out her inner shame, only with me had she begun to bring the inside out. Yet, somehow, I became another that she had to hide from. My heart aches to think of how deeply this young woman believes that what was within her was totally unacceptable to reveal to another. Her friends knew something was wrong, she was only seeing me “because her friends encouraged her”. But if they asked her what was up, she’d always reply “nothing, why?”, but would then escape from the social gathering, race home and cut her arms in a calming and familiar ritual. The cutting was the true companion, the release of anxiety, the reliable and consistent outlet, in a life where she had never quite fit in.

I find it amazing
our shame
our weirdness
our secrets
our fears
keep us separate
yet
these are what are most
fundamentally universal

The voice of this client was mixed with the expectations of friends, to be the extrovert, the party animal, the wild one. Her voice was mixed with the judgements of her parents, to wear the right clothes, say the right things, be the good girl. Her voice was mixed with her anger, deep anger, at herself and at the world; a voice unable to rise up and scream its truth – that it was tired of fighting, tired of never finding peace.

We worked together to reveal this voice, to allow this voice to be heard. I accepted her non-judgementally, I listened to her with respect, I challenged her faulty thinking as it arose again and again. Yet somehow, it wasn't enough.

when I see you
I see *you*
I don't see
a cutter
a self-injurer
a freak, as you say
I see
your struggle
your desire
to be heard
your struggle
to learn
to speak
your struggle
to find
the voice
that is only
yours
and
yours
alone

Was there a technique I was missing? Did my lack of experience do her a disservice? Perhaps. Yet, I have to recognise that her choice was hers and that I believe that I worked with her to the best of my ability.

you define yourself
with the expectations

and opinions of others
I understand
have lived the life
of hiding myself
from myself
to outwardly please
at what cost
I ask
as we explore
your pain
I will remind you
when you play
that role
with me
for here
all I ask
is that you
work
to be you
who you are
here
is much of who you are
there
but there
is making you
come here
so while you are here
I will work
to help
you see
what of there
you bring
here
and perhaps
with time
you can take
some of here
there

My experience with this client leaves me with many questions. Why are we so fearful? Why are we so afraid of embracing the freedom of who we really are? What is it

that keeps us looking outwardly for the approval and acceptance of others? What is it that keeps us in hiding, fearfully hiding that which is most truly us?

Everything terrifying is, in its deepest being, something helpless that wants our help.
Rainer Maria Rilke.⁶⁶

The notion of freedom is an interesting one. What is freedom really, and why are we so painfully afraid of it? First I want to explore how freedom can be manifested in an indirect way, a way which ultimately causes pain, disconnection, and despair. When we feel that we cannot truly be ourselves, when we have to hide ourselves from the world, which is so often the case, freedom arises in acts of desperation when we desperately try to take a stand in some small way to gain a sense of control. This could be the stolen cigarette, smoked in secret and in shame. It could be the cutting of an arm, to release the pent up frustration. It could be the impulsive acts of someone who has lost his or her inhibitions due to an overindulgence in drugs or alcohol. It could be the midnight raid of the fridge in the quiet privacy of the night. It could be the revengeful flirtation with another to hurt one's spouse. All of these acts share a certain quality of freedom, a freedom which is stolen away from the daily expectations of living.

In contrast, what am I calling real freedom? Real freedom is based in a commitment to listening to oneself in the moment. It is a recognition of the primacy of each moment, so that what occurs now, is dealt with now, and not left to fester in the next moment. It is authentic living where we are able to be true to what is most real and pressing in our hearts and minds in the here and now. It is having the courage to ask for

example, “are you mad at me?” instead of spending the day plaguing oneself with thoughts as to what one has done to cause another’s anger. It is learning to trust oneself, and believe that one has the right to speak, to clarify, to explore what is happening, without fear.

To become truly free is to give more importance to truth and justice than to the desire to fulfill at all costs our own compulsive needs. It's a paradox, though. These needs are part of our being; we need them in order to advance in life but we also need to learn how to govern them rather than be governed by them.

Jean Vanier⁶⁷

We fear disapproval. We fear rejection. We fear being disliked. We desire respect. We desire recognition. We desire independence. We are stuck between opposing poles which serve to keep us preoccupied in the here and now and unable to act simply.

I'd like to try to understand why
why, when we know what we need to do
we still don't do it
why when we know the path we need to take
we still fear the first step
what is it that fuels inertia?
that keeps us from moving?
fear.
fear of rejection
fear of ridicule
fear of responsibility
in a culture that condones escapism
to stand up
is to stand out

Somehow, I have come to believe that this fear within myself, is in part related to my knowledge that freedom equals responsibility. To be free means that you are in a position of power. Not power in the hungry, thirsting, grasping sort of way, but power in a way which requires great commitment to my life and those of others. You would think that this is a kind of power that I would want, and in many ways I do. However, there is still something in me that holds me back.

security
comfort
in a pattern
a behaviour
that may not lead
out of a hole
but
comforting yes
familiar
safe
as we side step
our call to self
turn a deaf ear
to the voice
the voice
that edges
that knows
the way
home

to answer the why
the why we do what we know is not good for ourselves
the why we continue
when the silent voice screams
our complaints
our struggles
keep us company
keep us from facing
what remains unknown
until we choose to stop

break the cycle
step out
risk
reach
expose
grow

Freedom lies in discovering that the truth is not a fixed set of certitudes but a mystery we enter into, one step at a time. It is a process of going deeper and deeper into an unfathomable reality.
Jean Vanier⁶⁸

Freedom means forever stepping out of yourself, forever taking risks. It is a recipe for the possibility of continual rejection, disapproval, and dislike of others. Why? In part, I believe that people can be disapproving of those that are powerful in this good way, because on some level it reminds them that they also have work to do...that they also are afraid.

At bottom, every human being knows very well that he is in this world just once, as something unique, and that no accident, however strange, will throw together into a unity such a curious and diffuse plurality: he knows it, but hides it like a bad conscience – why? From fear of his neighbour who insists on convention and veils himself with it.
Nietzsche⁶⁹

I have lived believing that part of me was “bad” and should be hidden, and that only my “good” part could be shown to the world. I have experienced feeling that no one really knew me, and what they thought they knew was a charade, as I knew how “bad” I truly was. I have experienced this exhausting and deeply isolating duplicitous existence.

With this suicidal client, my experience allowed me the empathy to not be shocked at her actions, to not judge her, or become frustrated and angry. Yet this same experience which on the one hand can offer me insight into understanding another's distress can also plague me and poke holes in my resolve.

SELF 1: (with incredulity) You must be joking, right? You are presuming to be able to sit in that chair and help someone through their troubles? You?

SELF 2: (indignant) ya, so? (careful)what do you mean?

SELF 1: (Condescending) C'mon..look at yourself. You're a mess. You can't sit still, you're always running, running, running to fill the void, (sing songy) searching , searching, can't sit still..

SELF 2: Ya, but, -

SELF 1: Oh please..we know your history...we know where you've been...what you've done...you thief...you liar...you whore...how can you hold yourself up as a model of behaviour?

SELF 2: But...maybe that was how it was all supposed to go...I mean, it's not that I don't regret some things, but that experience is now mine....I know how it feels.....I understand the temptation.....the confusion.....the chaos..

SELF 1: (interrupting) –and you think that's enough? you think that now you've been there you know it all?

SELF 2: (meekly) ..no, but I want to believe that it will help me relate..that it will help me to experience and understand those places..I dunno, maybe you're right, who am I to presume anything?

SELF 3: (Benevolently, with a smile) I've been listening to the two of you squabble, and you're just stalling aren't you?

SELF 1: Huh?

SELF 2: Pardon? Stalling?

SELF 3: Come on now..I know you know what I'm talking about....There's nothing to be afraid of...you simply need to trust me.

SELF 1: (like a frightened child) I can't. I'm scared.

SELF 2: (like a martyr) I'm not worthy.

SELF 3: You can and you will. You see it's not about where you've been, or what you've done...it's about what you choose to do with it now. Come here. Come on now there's room enough for all of us. There now, isn't that better?

I have noticed that when I stop for a moment, breathe, and still myself, my mind can move to a more unitive perspective where I can look at my thinking objectively, step out of the dualism, and become less judgemental with myself. This, I believe, is the path to the holistic vision of the Self, expressed by the humanistic and feminist traditions. It is the ability to overcome the polarized thinking of bad and good parts of the Self, and see the Self as an expression of becoming. In this regard I am able to acknowledge when I have erred, yet it can be done with the equal acknowledgement that I am a mature person who is still learning and growing. It is for this reason that I am able to let go of this client emotionally and not blame myself for her actions. I know that I did all that I could. Perhaps with more experience I could do a better or different kind of work with her, but all I had to offer was where I was at the time.

I think that sometimes we forget that we are part of creation, of its cycles and rhythms. As the seasons change, as night

becomes day, and day, night, we too cycle in our growth, our moods, our experience. We are not here to merely feel happiness, contentment, and peace. We are here to feel the full range of emotion...to feel the grief that gives joy its poignancy. The eternal balance seems fine when it applies 'out there'...the ying and yang, the darkness and light. Why is it so difficult for us to accept our sorrow and our struggles as natural...normal...even welcome? I have come to bless my pain as difficult as it is to experience, for I recognize that pain equals growth. As the seed struggles to grow against the weight of the soil, as the butterfly struggles to emerge from its tight cocoon, so are we obliged to grow, through our pain, into ourselves.

*Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.
Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.
And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life, your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy;
And you would accept the seasons of your heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields.*
Kahlil Gibran⁷⁰

As we seek to possess unconditional positive regard and non-judgemental acceptance of our clients, we must also work to bestow these same qualities on our relationships with ourselves. Allowing ourselves to transcend our judgements of ourselves, we can rise to transcend the dualistic patterns that serve to limit our self-

definition. To center and accept ourselves in all of our ambiguity and all of our polarities, gives us a place from which to act, a place to choose how we want to act from a discerned and responsive state.

Have you ever really looked at yourself in the mirror? Not when you're brushing your teeth or hair, but instead have you ever really chosen to look at yourself, to look at *you* deeply? Have you taken the time to look into your eyes, to look deeply into the darkness of your pupils, to look through the windows of the soul into what lies within? I have attempted to do this: to look without fixing my hair, to look without noticing the lines appearing on my brow, to look without resorting immediately to some form of self-criticism. And when I have done this, I have remembered that what I see before me reflected is my casing, my envelope. I am more than this although I spend energy battering myself for my outward flaws: the wrinkles, the flab, the hair that isn't working. And I wonder could it be possible that I could one day learn to love and accept myself with all of my flaws? Could I even come to accept myself in the here and now as perfect in my own inherent complexity? Will I ever surrender to the notion that despite the fact that I am not perfect and never will be, that I am nevertheless always in process? Can I begin to allow my true self to emerge in all of its imperfections and flaws at the risk of making a complete

fool of myself? at the risk of being laughed at? at the risk of being
misunderstood? at the risk of being loved? Isn't this what I am
asking my client to do?

With time, patience, forgiveness, therapy, tentative trust, journaling, and
dedication, I now choose to explore deeply my motivations, yearnings, and desires,
suspending judgment as best as I can, to come to accept and learn who and what I am.
This process of the unending quest for self-acceptance and self-understanding I feel is
essential not only for my personal growth, but as a counsellor, I am ethically bound to be
working to develop myself so that I can meet my clients with the greatest degree of
congruency, authenticity, and self-awareness.

there is a story
of a young woman
who brings with her
a story of her own
the story changes as she grows
the edges are softened
the judgements less harsh
as she learns to see larger contexts
and as the context comes into focus
the story expands
and is seen as an impartial viewer
the story of a victim
who unconsciously chose her victimhood
and blamed herself
again and again and again
but now finds room for forgiveness
of the context
of herself
and is driven to action

to see clearly
is to see the interweaving contexts
of the interweaving worlds
and for a moment
regard yourself as a player
dutifully playing
a role
which is
not
your
own

to see clearly
is to recognise
that there is always a choice
always a choice
about submitting
or surpassing

...the authenticity of an adult is a complex relational process between being and becoming, which requires that we contain our impulses and actions while we explore our feelings. As we contain and reflect on our feelings we gather enough internal data and self-knowledge to be capable of making conscious, authentic choices. In other words, we become self-aware, aware of the people in our environment and our effect on them and responsible, that is, able to respond.
Michael Robbins⁷¹

There is important distinction to be made between the act of reacting and that of responding. We may strive to be authentic and genuine with our clients, but does that mean our most immediate reactions to what they have said are the most authentic? My sense is that when we react in an almost immediate ‘knee-jerk’ sort of way, we have to be extremely careful to listen to ourselves and from where this reaction has arisen. Reactions such as these often tend to be emotionally-laden, belonging to a defense mechanism that seeks to protect itself. I am not saying that this is always the case. Our first impressions

may be our strongest intuitive reactions to a situation. What I am saying is that to respond with discernment requires the discipline to inwardly turn and check our motivations and impulses to then make a conscious choice in how to respond. This inward turn is continual; always turning inward, to then bring the best of the inside outward.

One of the most important questions we might meditate on with our clients is the discrimination between those desires or aversions which are based on our conditioning and reactivity, and those impulses which come from an authentic connection with our inner guidance.

Michael Robbins⁷²

To listen carefully to ourselves requires the courage to meet ourselves. Further it requires the courage to say what needs to be said once we have heard ourselves and discerned a response. When you have been taught the adage, “if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all”, it can be difficult to summon the courage to challenge a repetitive theme in a client’s story that seems to keep them from moving forward. It is the ‘edge’ we must possess as counsellors so that our work with clients doesn’t merely enable them to stay where they are.

courage
wrapped and girdled
in honesty
love
respect
and responsibility
courage
to speak the truth
compassionately
requires

faith
in the process
belief
in inherent wisdom
commitment
rigorous
commitment
to hearing
the inner voice
of truth

An example:

I had seen this young woman four times. This was her fifth appointment. As always, she entered, sat down sighing, and began to relate in almost a bored manner all the events that had occurred over the past week.

“..and then I went down to the store and bought some groceries. And at 5:00 I went to hockey practice and carried my equipment down to the arena...and then my mom called when I got back and our cat is sick again..she has some problem with her kidney or something..and then I didn't do much..I had homework but I didn't feel like doing it so I listened to music..”

I found myself drifting. She's doing it again..going through all these details. I am bored. She must be bored. I have listened patiently for a month, supporting, encouraging, accepting, and now I'm feeling bored to tears. Wait I shouldn't be feeling bored...she's still talking..

“so then I missed that class, and decided to make breakfast. I had some things in my fridge..bread and jam..so I did that..”

and then it came out, almost before I realized I was saying it I said:

“It sounds like you’re going through the motions.”

She stops abruptly and says:

“what?”

“I said, it sounds like you’re going through the motions.”

I can't believe I just said that...that's not a very nice thing to say...but it's out now...oh boy...but then she says:

“You know, you’re right, I am.”

Something in her looks alive for the first time, like she's engaged. Puzzled, but engaged. I ask:

“Why do you think that is?”

“I'm not sure..but I don't think I like it.”

As this session developed we explored how going through the motions kept her from really taking responsibility for herself. She became more animated than I had ever seen her. By the end of the session she had on her own determined that she would get in touch with a relative who was in the same line of work as her chosen University program and explore with her what options were available to her post-graduation.

Evidently, what was unique for me about this session was that in listening to my boredom, and what I sensed as being her boredom, I spoke from an honest place within myself. I felt uncertain, because it didn't seem to be the nicest thing to say, however I also realize that my role isn't to merely support my client and say "nice" things. In contrast, when I actually trusted what had come forth in me and spoke it, it seemed to catalyze something for my client. I had given her space, lots of it, and she was making good use of it. The time was ripe to step into the story and challenge the status quo. This resulted from my willingness to trust what emerged in me and to speak its truth.

My understanding has grown to acknowledge that my life long quest has in large part been a quest for self-transcendence. This quest has been largely intellectual though. Always thinking, always analyzing, always reading and searching, I've tried to think myself out of myself, I think. My intuitive sense, however, is that self-transcendence manifests itself in our ability to move into ourselves, to surrender and allow ourselves to experience here and now, just as we are and listen to the truth that emerges. Further, instead of 'transcending ourselves' perhaps we need to 'move into ourselves' and seek to make peace with our bodies.

The body is objectified in this culture; it has become a thing to manipulate, to present, to fight against. The quality of our relationship with our body is dependent on how we receive it. Is it object, against which we war and fight, blaming it for our limitations? (I wish I was taller, slimmer, that my stomach was flatter, that my teeth were whiter, that my muscles were more toned, that my hair was thicker..etc...then I'd be okay). Or can we

conceive of a relationship where our body is subject, respected as a source of wisdom, as an integral part of who and what we are?

Breathing deeply and sitting in ourselves in the here and now, connects us to a broad source of knowledge. (Where am I holding tension? Why does my stomach feel uneasy? What brought on that headache? Why has my heartrate just increased?) To gain in this awareness of ourselves and our bodies, allows us another source by which to receive and assess our clients. (Since she sat down, my chest has tightened..why? Is it something in me? Is it something in her? “I feel tense, is there something happening here for you?”) The subtlety of these impressions can be available to us before we have cognitive understanding of the situation. To miss out on this non-verbal and symbolic communication, is to miss out on rich information.

I let myself go into the immediacy of the relationship where it is my total organism which takes over and is sensitive to the relationship, not simply my consciousness. I am not consciously responding in a planful or analytic way, but simply react in an unreflective way to the other individual, my reaction based, (but not consciously) on my total organismic sensitivity to this other person. I live the relationship on this basis.
Carl Rogers⁷³

hello body
breathing deeply
I remember you are there
so often in my head
in my ideas, my dreams
running from you
from an embodied existence
I want to begin to
nurture you
heal you
respect you

listen to your wisdom

forgive my trespasses
for they have been many
I have hated you
despised you
desired to be out of my skin
beat you
worn you out
pushed you to extremes

please help me
to love you
befriend you
accept you
embody you

I have been missing you
hello again

Although I am beginning to understand the my need to better integrate my body and mind, I am, nevertheless, a racer. My mind is always moving forward, backward, in and out, I have to stop to remind it to be quiet, to tune into this moment, to feel my body sitting on the chair here and now, and breathe. Marion Woodman suggests that:

*...most of us keep our breath as shallow as possible because the eruption of feeling is too intense if we breathe deeply.*⁷⁴

To breathe deeply is to choose to feel, it is to choose to live. To breathe deeply is to commit to experiencing experience here and now, in this body, in this time and place. To meet one's body in the present is to allow all feeling, sensation, and awareness to rise up and be present. This can be overwhelming. But how can I presume to teach a client

progressive relaxation, visualization, meditative techniques, or other stress-relieving exercises, if I am unable to relax in myself and face the moment?

In her work on feminist counselling⁷⁵, Jocelyn Chaplin makes use of the metaphor of the counsellor as container. As a container, the counsellor's role is to be present with the client and hold the space giving the client room to explore. To hold the space is to provide a stable and secure environment in which the client feels able to share anything without fear of judgement. This holding space allows the client to simply be.

Space is a womb: room to grow. The most important skills in learning to be a therapist have to do with giving the client room to grow.
David Brazier⁷⁶

To contain another must we not first know how to contain ourselves? To offer space to another, must we not first have emptied ourselves?

what would happen if you stood still?
if for one moment
the worries, upsets, hopes, and desires
were forgotten
who would you be?

The feminist notion of providing a sense of containment for the client requires that I am comfortable and aware enough of my own body and being, that I can contain both what emerges in my client and what emerges is me as a result. In working with one client in particular, I experienced what it felt like to have the container leak.

she'd been raped
had become pregnant
had had an abortion
catholic
and it was now the time
that the child would have arrived
in spring
part of me couldn't stand the pain
part of me felt the deep ache
and knew why
she kept missing appointments
even as I write about it
I feel somewhat sick
overwhelmed
by her experience
it carved out my being
in a way that changed me
I was angry
so angry
for how this powerful
and beautiful woman
had been diminished
flattened
raked
by the greed of another
her spirit is wounded
and fear prevails
where spontaneity once reigned
I was honoured
so honoured
by her trust
her tentative willingness
to begin to expose
the depth of her sorrow
the reality of her existence
I was devoted
so devoted
to help her begin
begin again
to find a space
however small
within herself
where she could feel safe
she has not returned of late

I think of her often
and wonder how she copes
last time she decided
she could no longer
ignore the feelings
numb them with smoke and drink
that she had tried
and it hadn't worked
she wanted to go there
to the place of pain
the night of the incident
the details of the agony
but didn't know how
I said
slowly
let it come up as it does
but she hasn't returned
I
am forever faced
with my helplessness
my feelings
of desperately
desiring
to take away the pain
but my need to rush in
and dress the wound
must wait
until the wound
has had time
to reveal itself
and ask for healing
I
must heal myself
and the pain that arises
in me
part hers
part mine
part
every woman
that has been
taken
by the greed
and
although

she has not returned
I think of her
I send her strength
in my own way
and
hope

To be one woman, truly, wholly, is to be all women.
Kate Braverman⁷⁷

In reflecting on my work with this client, I realize that my desire was to help her heal, partly because I wanted her to feel some relief; partly because the intensity of her pain was difficult for me to hold. It was difficult both because I could feel deeply what her experience had left her with, but also because her experience raised difficult feelings in me from my own past. It is a fine line we walk where on the one hand we want to draw from our experience to more deeply empathize with our clients, but cannot go so deeply into our own experience that it causes us to act out of our need to quell our own anxiety.

My sense was that I wanted her to rediscover a place within herself that could offer her some source of security. We did a simple guided imagery to help her visualize a place within herself that she could return to when things became too painful in session, or in her life. Fortunately the experience was positive for her; she fell deeply into a relaxed state and later related that she was on a beach surrounded by music and beautiful coloured light. When reflecting on this work I have to be honest with myself however, and recognize that my desire for her to find a safe place was in part to quell my anxiety. What if it had been too soon and the guided imagery had led to her revisiting the trauma

before being ready to do so? The lesson I have learned is to proceed with extreme care when I notice that the pain of my client is activating something deep and personal within me. It is my responsibility to seek supervision to help me work through my own experience so that I can be more fully present with my client.

Tuning into our bodies in the moment and allowing ourselves to truly feel what arises can be both painfully difficult and deeply rewarding. Each client, can teach me something if I am willing to open up and listen to how I respond inwardly and outwardly. The dynamic between us is a dance...if I can just trust the rhythm.

I recognize that breathing deeply, finding one's center, and allowing oneself to be present in the moment in one's body, are the precursors to cultivating an inner calm; a quiet mind. It is accomplished in the surrender that comes with the courage to face oneself. Further, the development of a quiet mind, an inner calm, a greater degree of presence in the here and now, speaks not only to me of a certain inner discipline, but also of the need for an engagement with an aspect of myself which I can only call at present, my Higher Self.

There are times when I am in session, that I make a conscious effort to connect with what I consider to be my higher self. I experience this as a centering and a reaching up, a stretching of my mind and being, towards something which I imagine as being just above me. There are times, more often than not, when I consciously choose to speak to my client's higher self

while they are sitting in front of me. I don't tell them that I am doing this, it isn't like an empty chair technique or the like. Rather, it is speaking to them in a way that acknowledges and respects their own inherent wisdom; their inherent capacities for healing and strength.

At these times, I listen carefully to all that is happening, within me, within my client, within the dynamic between us. When I make a conscious decision to speak to the higher self of another, I speak with humility, respecting that he or she has the answers to questions she seeks. It is almost as if I am speaking to all that she is, and not just the troubled person that he or she is in the moment. In this encounter I recognise that our paths have crossed and that he or she has as much to teach me, as I, her.

The higher self, I believe, is not something that resides at the end of a lifetime of struggle towards self knowledge. I don't visualize the journey in this linear way. Instead, I believe that the higher self is always with us, always available, and there are times when we touch into it as we grow in our understanding. It can be accessed in a conscious way, such as through the practice of stilling and quieting the body and mind and listening carefully to what emerges. However, I feel that it also emerges at times when we are not actively seeking it. In those times when we just had a

sense, a feeling, that we should do something, or say something, the higher mind is active. This is not simply impulsivity, acting on a whim, but rather acting on a feeling that arises from our core. It can have a commanding presence about it. Some could call this sense intuition, and perhaps this is what intuition is, but whatever it is called, my experience is that all we can do is to learn to trust it. Listen carefully, trust what it is saying, and act accordingly.

Over time my experience is, that the more it is trusted, the stronger it becomes.

I find that when I am closer to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness in the relationship, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my presence is releasing and helpful...I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes...At these moments it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other.

Carl Rogers⁷⁸

The work then, is not the linear climb towards an ultimate end, but the gentle spiralling, touching into our wisdom and then spinning out again. There are moments that I can feel completely connected with this wisdom, and moments where I don't know which way to turn. The higher self in my opinion, however, is what speaks when we find our true voice. It guides when we are yet blind. It is always there, connecting us at a fundamental level with all that is. When I consciously choose to work from my higher self while in session, I don't know for sure that I am successfully doing so. My hope is

however, that my intention to do so may activate something greater, something more graceful, more profound, to enter into the dialogue. As long as I am aligning myself with something good, I feel it can only be of help.

without always realizing it
I often sit in session
with my elbows on my knees
my chin resting on my clasped hands
and when I become aware
I realize
that it's almost as if
I'm sitting in prayer
and so
I pray
please be here with us
in this moment
and guide
our time
together

If I recognize and am open to this potential in myself, I am more able to be open to this potential in others, seeing them as individuals each on a unique journey towards meaning and personal fulfillment. My hope is that with this recognition, they will never appear to me as simply the behaviours or problems with which they present.

this is my belief...
that we all have the power
to reach up into ourselves
and pull down what is most divine
that we forget
and are not reminded
to remember
that we are inherently good
that we doubt

we are enough
just as we are

My mission in life is centered on my relentless quest to understand and embody my true potential. Perhaps this is the nature of an I-thou relationship with oneself; it is the conscious intention of meeting myself as subject, so honour and embody the gifts I have been given. This is my responsibility, to grow through my fear and be who I am truly meant to be.

If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.
The Gospel of Thomas⁷⁹

It is not as though I anticipate there being a time when I will finally get there having fulfilled all my potential and then feel as though I have arrived and can hence rest. Rather, my sense is that this is an ongoing, life-long process, coloured by glimpses of what this fulfillment might be like.

My sense is that to embody my potential, I need to orient myself to that which is greater, larger, better, most pure, most wise...that which encompasses all that is good. In transpersonal psychotherapy, impulses towards spiritual growth are considered basic to full humanness.⁸⁰

I have experienced moments in my life when everything
has connected. It feels as though I am holding everything within

myself all at once in all its beauty and simplicity. It is moments like these that lead me to believe that I am more than my thoughts, my emotions, my behaviour; I am an intergral part of something that inspires and invites me to continue my journey. I can't begin to communicate this experience, it manifests itself almost as an ache; an ache from the pain of joy, an ache from the desire to commune completely. My skin is all that holds me in.

This basic human impulse of which the transpersonalists speak directs itself towards an aspect of our reality that I believe possesses several names in our language (and certainly far more than what appear here):

...God ... the All ... Spirit ... Love ... Allah ... the Higher Self ... the Good ... Grace ... Enlightenment ... Yahweh ... Beauty ... Creator ... Goddess... Peace ... Transcendence ... the One ...Mystery...Truth...the Absolute...Ultimate Meaning

I appreciate all of these names although I've yet to find one which I am comfortable using consistently. Perhaps this is because language in itself is a limited system unable to define, represent, or in any way encompass this reality. Each name given as a descriptor brings with it associations that can serve to embed what is trying to be described in a context which is not necessarily my own. For this reason, I tend to honour all of these descriptors as attempts to describe an essence, which in my opinion encompasses and exceeds them all.

we struggle so hard to compartmentalize our world
to sum it up into neat little boxes
in an orderly fashion
it gives us a sense of calm
accomplishment
control
our existence however
is one huge ambiguity
a question mark
a riddle
try to pin it down
and it slips out

when you least expect it

My orientation towards the spiritual manifests itself in my attempts to learn how
to allow the spirit to flow through me, in my life, in my work.

My belief is
that how I orient myself
to myself
to my partner, family, friends, and colleagues
to strangers I meet
to the world in general
all plays a role
all is with me
as I sit
in the chair of privilege

*A spiritual person relies upon their faith, energy, mindfulness, centredness and wisdom.
They have become a very different sort of creature. These higher potentials are the ones
which we need to develop as therapists.*

David Brazier⁸¹

I ask myself then, what is it for me to be a spiritual practitioner? Karasu suggests that a return to the self through solitude is required. In this way, he suggests that

...the more one is in contact with one's own inner world, the more he or she will establish connections with the sacredness of the outer world.⁸²

Relax. Take a few deep breaths. Find the centre. Open. Open the top of your head to the All. Calm. Listen. Follow the breath. Easy calm breath...down deeply, out completely. This is the place, the only place you have. This is where it starts, this is where it has to end; this is what you want to be aware of throughout.

This is where I begin each time I sit in the chair of privilege. The chair where I listen, the chair where I sit, is a chair of profound responsibility. This chair is in a room. A simple room with four white walls, a window, a desk, my chair and two others; this space has become the hallowed witness of the unfolding ambiguities, struggles, and triumphs, of the most difficult challenge with which we are faced as human beings: the challenge of the turn within.

To stop, turn, and look; to face ourselves in all of our uncertainty and shame, has to be the most difficult challenge that exists. It is the road not taken, the narrow gate, the hero's journey; the only path to the true salvation of self-knowledge. As I

sit with a client who has courageously chosen to follow this path, I am abundantly aware that the work is not theirs alone. What is common to us all, is that we share this journey. My feeling is that in sitting in the chair of privilege, I must be rigorously attuned to my inner development, for to ask another to take this challenge, I too must rise.

To rise to meet oneself is to find peace with solitude, and when I consider the qualities that I need for my further development both as an individual and as a counsellor, I am again struck by the need to develop a quiet mind. My experience has been that when I can stop the flow of words, and simply be, I am better able to sense the flow of spirit.

how
to stop
breathe
listen
still

In addressing the realm of spirit in counselling, there are several avenues to be considered. First, as I have been describing, is what I feel is my need to attune to a centered place within myself. It is a going into where I am here and now, to breathe deeply, and connect with that which is greater so that I can be most present with myself and with my clients. However, what of my clients' experience of this aspect of life? The realm of spirit is as vast as the myriad of ways we strive to access it. I may speak of

spirit, while my client may speak of God, of the Creator, of Jehovah, or any other name given to this aspect of reality. How can I best meet my client where they are?

There is an undifferentiated base of faith and love from which other variations spring. This love is not possessing, not capturing, it isn't doing something. Love is a way of existing, a way of being with people, animals, nature, and God.

T. Byram Karasu⁸³

it was early one morning
the first client
the sun streamed through
and the room felt awkward
like he wasn't convinced he was ready
it began with talk of being behind
in school, classes, work
confusion about direction
and as we explored
the why, the when, the how
the room shifted
and he let me in
all his life he was afraid
to look in mirrors
afraid of what he'd see
and one night last week
in the early hours
he decided to face his image
in the darkness of the night
he saw something
something which terrified him
something which made him laugh
in an eerie, evil way
that frightened him deeply
and he panicked
phoning his mother
she told him to read Psalm 23
and I said
the Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want
for in that moment
I realized something

of his paradigm
that he worked
within images of good and evil
he believed he'd seen the devil in his face
in his eyes
and he berated himself
for having abandoned
the daily reading of the Bible
and I thought
this paradigm is not wholly mine
but it is definitely his
and so I worked within
what is God to you?
and what do you feel you need to do?
what is it that you fear seeing?
somehow
somehow we communed in some way
I don't know if it was because
I wasn't shocked
I believed him
the room was forgotten
the only space was between us
surrounding us
in a moment of time
yet somehow timeless
he left lighter
smiling
with the plan
to read his Bible
to reconnect
with himself
with life
with God

When the session with this client moved from an exploration of his anxiety around late school assignments to a deeply felt disclosure around his misplacement of faith, I was initially inwardly shocked. This had never happened before. Hearing him speak of the terror he felt when he saw evil in his own eyes, I tried to imagine myself

looking in a mirror and experiencing such fear. I realized in part that one aspect of the intensity was that he believed in Satan, and felt that he was being possessed because he had turned from his study of the Bible. This is not my realm of belief, however, the fear and uncertainty that coloured his self-perception was something that I could grasp onto. I returned in my mind to my Anglican upbringing, as a context somewhat closer to where he was. When he shared that his mother had told him to read Psalm 23, before I knew it I was reciting, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” “Yes,” he said, and his eyes met mine with new connection, “it made me totally relax”. He told me that he wanted to return to reading the Bible, that it had been missing from his life and it was time to “go towards God.”

This was only one session, and this client never returned. I recognize that perhaps whatever he saw that frightened him so much is where the work with this client lay. Had he returned, perhaps we could have explored this further. Perhaps this is why he did not return. Perhaps he was not ready to go further. What this client taught me however, was immense. Because of our encounter, I immediately began to consider the realm of the spirit and religion in the lives of my clients, and what would be required of me to meet them.

and what of God?
can we speak of God?
who/what/where is God?
do you know
who/what/where God is for you?
is it important?
to you?

Human beings are not only psychosexual and psychosocial, they are also psychospiritual.
Carl Jung⁸⁴

*At the birth of Western culture, healing and therapy were the same. Healing meant to make whole. Psychotherapy meant the care of the soul. The Hippocratic tradition of *mens sana in corpore sano* was a biospiritual tradition which sought to care for the spiritual wellbeing of the patient, as well as his mental and physical state.*
David Boadella⁸⁵

Too many therapists think “spiritual” is synonymous with mysticism and the occult. Spiritual refers to the experience of wholeness and integration, irrespective of religious belief or affiliation.
Harold Bloomfield⁸⁶

In each traditional religious worldview- Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist- there is the recognition of a spiritual reality that transcends the individual person and can have a powerful impact on the growth and healing of an individual, once the person commits to open himself or herself to the spiritual world. There is also within religious worldviews an emphasis that the human being has a spiritual nature and spontaneously yearns for transcendence or spiritual fulfillment.
Donald Moss⁸⁷

Seeing holiness only in others – or only in our own group – is the problem. Seeing the sacred in ourselves and in all living things is the solution.
Gloria Steinem⁸⁸

What is true of the experience of individuals is also true of cultures and, by extension, of the planet. Unprecedented trauma and unequalled challenge have created the conditions for an opening in the foreground of existence and a rising purpose. Whether we want them or not, the depths are rising out of the vacuum of divine no-thing-ness, which contains the seeds and codings of all that can ever be.
Jean Houston⁸⁹

Spirituality is seeded, germinates, sprouts and blossoms in the mundane. It is to be found and nurtured in the smallest of daily activities.
Thomas Moore⁹⁰

Whether that end be called the God of Christianity, the World-Soul of Pantheism, the Absolute of Philosophy, the desire to attain it and the movement towards it – so long as this is a genuine life process and not an intellectual speculation – is the proper subject of mysticism. I believe this movement to represent the true line of development of the highest form of human consciousness.
Evelyn Underhill⁹¹

I want this piece of work to speak...to speak to the inner souls, inner places of humanity. I want to stir the yearning for communion, the yearning for growth. I want this work to dance..to fly..to sing..to be beyond what it is.

Anne Finlay

What do we mean by spiritual? In my own life it has been a constant process of searching through comparative religion, mysticism, philosophy, and sacred texts, to ascertain what commonalities I find throughout them. This however, is my experience, and I must use caution when a client speaks of his or her spiritual life, to not assume that I know what it means to him or her. The difficulty with not probing deeply to understand, with not asking “how is that for you?” or “what does that mean to you,” without exploring deeply how another experiences something, is the risk of assuming that we understand. This assumption is based on our understanding of the experience from our life experience, which in itself is helpful, but to assume that we understand prior to getting an in depth description from another can lead us to draw conclusions based on too little information.

The manifestation of spirituality in today’s world, within and outside of organized religions, is highly complex. How can we find a common ground from which to work? My sense is that there are several important questions that need to be asked when considering this integral component of human nature when it arises in counselling. How does religion differ from spirituality? What does it mean to the client? How will my perspective affect my work with clients? How does gender and culture affect one’s experience of spirituality? Does spirituality manifest differently at different stages of

adult development? I carry these questions with me and seek to develop greater understanding of their meanings.

The counselling process, in many respects, is about the search and evaluation of important experiences which occur in one's life and the desire to make meaning of them. It is this impulse towards growth and self-actualization as the humanists and transpersonalists suggest. This impulse

... is characterized by an urgency for introspection and the formulation of important questions that one has for oneself and others which often include those regarding personal destiny, happiness, an ethical reference for one's behavior, God, the meaning of life, suffering, and death. Underlying these questions are issues regarding the nature of human beings, and notions or images of fulfillment, harmony, and redemption, all invested with profound meanings and implications for the individual and society.
Andre Nino⁹²

We, as counsellors, must be aware that the spirit is rising. In our modern world, the spiritual has moved outside of the hallowed halls of churches, temples, and mosques, and is residing openly in the secular community. Talk shows, bestsellers, retreats, conferences, and magazines are all talking about and trying to reach the spirit. We must be aware and open to this force, in us, and in our clients. Whether or not a counsellor accepts spirituality as an integral component of his or her own life, it is important to accept that it may be an important aspect in the lives of our clients. A client's decision to seek counselling can be driven by an attempt to make sense of mistakes, pain, and loneliness; or the attempt to strive for goodness, fairness, and justice; all meaning-making

endeavours. This desire to make meaning of life's ambiguities can often be couched in a quest for the spiritual and a desire to understand the nature of our existence.

To be blind, unaware, or uncomfortable with this process is to potentially overlook an integral component of our clients' lives and a rich source of assessment information. What are the client's worldviews? Do they have a religious orientation? Does it sustain them? Is it a source on which they draw? Or is it an unhealthy influence on their sense of self? Is the client a member of a religious or spiritual community? Does this community offer the client a sense of comfort? of belonging? This speaks to the counsellor's need to be aware and sensitive to spiritual concerns and ways of thinking. It requires a suspension of bias and preconceived notions regarding spirituality and an openness to experience the direct lived experience of the client.

As suggested by Zinnbauer and Pargament⁹³ two of the better approaches for counsellors engaged in spiritual and religious issues with clients, are those of constructivism and pluralism. The constructivist approach seeks to discover the constructed reality of the client. In this approach, the assumption is that there is no absolute reality, but rather individuals construct reality through their strivings to understand and interpret their experience. This approach does not require the counsellor to be religious or spiritual to work with a client with these concerns, but rather open to experiencing the lived experience of the client.

A pluralistic approach, on the other hand, "recognizes the existence of a religious or spiritual ultimate reality but allows for multiple interpretations and paths towards it."⁹⁴ A pluralistic approach recognizes the cultural diversity of religious and spiritual

expression. A counsellor with this approach can hold differing beliefs from those of his or her client, while respecting that each are attempting to express an absolute truth.

Evidently, when working with spiritual or religious issues in counselling, the ethical onus is on the counsellor to have the self-awareness to know what values they are bringing to the work, and to self-disclose if the work moves into areas of potential value conflict.

Personally, I am still in the process of seeking 'God', nor do I ever believe I will possess a fixed idea of what this aspect of my reality is. My stance is that of a pluralist, I believe that there is something, but that the paths to reach it are manifold. In this regard, I hope to be open to how this experience manifests itself in the lives of my clients, and to not impose my beliefs when they are not shared by another.

are we aware
how crucial our role is?
that once upon a time
there were priests
soothsayers
wise ones
in whom
we'd confide
that today
our world is spinning
spinning towards
greater alienation
greater disconnection
and the people to whom we turn
as a culture
are becoming fewer
we own
a sacred space in society
a place where
people are able to dream
to question
to rage

it is sacred
this space

To return to the notion presented by T. Byram Karasu in his article *Spiritual Psychotherapy*, a spiritual therapist is not one what does, but who one *is*. This distinction is important for it speaks to the understanding from which a counsellor works. To possess an awareness of the importance of being open to spiritual concerns is important; to live and work in a way that allows the spirit to move is perhaps even more so. I have wondered at length on how this can be accomplished. It requires, I believe, several aspects which I have already mentioned: the empathy to sense the client's private world as if it were my own; the awareness and intentional choice to work from a place of higher mind; the willingness to accept my inherent contradictions and respond from a place which seeks to transcend them; the cultivation of a place of calm within; the openness to limitless possibilities of human growth; and finally, an ability to get out of my own way and simply trust the process.

We can never know what strengths and revelations might be on the other side of our fears until we face them and feel them all the way through. True positive thinking is the mental stance of surrender, simply trusting the process. We learn to accept what is. And we have faith in the bigger picture; even when we cannot see it clearly, we trust that it's always there and that, if not now, someday we'll stand tall enough to see it.
Jacqueline Small⁹⁵

SURRENDER

What does it mean to surrender? to give up? throw in the towel? show your defeat? admit failure? Why is the notion of surrender so coloured by weakness? Because we're conditioned to fight? to struggle? to win? because power prevails? because might is right?

SURRENDER

Why is this word so threatening, so frightening to our sense of self? Why do we quake at the notion of giving in? allowing? letting go?

SURRENDER

To be 'together' is to be in control, right? So why would we want to surrender control? (if I let go someone might see me, might really see me) Why would we want to give ourselves over? Why surrender? Why surrender at all... and surrender to what exactly?

SURRENDER

Here is a paradox for us: To surrender is to touch into true courage and freedom.

when I speak of surrender
I don't mean weakness
I don't mean giving up
I mean giving over
giving over the need to control
giving over the need to quell your own anxiety
giving over the need to be right
the need to be needed
surrender is to allow your
will to align with your Will

So what is it to surrender as a person, as a counsellor? And to what am I surrendering? Carl Rogers, in his later work, spoke of a quality of flow that occurred in session when he allowed the process to carry him towards goals of which he was not always aware.

I am often aware of the fact that I do not know, cognitively, where this immediate relationship is leading. It is as though both I and the client, often fearfully, let ourselves slip into the stream of becoming, a stream or process which carries us along. It is the fact that the therapist has let himself float in this stream of experience or life previously, and found it rewarding, that makes him each time less fearful of taking the plunge. It is my confidence that makes it easier for the client to embark also, a little bit at a time.
Carl Rogers⁹⁶

My belief is this, that all that is required is given in each moment. In each moment, we have the choice to impose on what is given, or allow what is given to emerge. By this I mean that as I am sitting with another I can impose on the situation through fulfilling my need to be counsellor or I can relax and allow what emerges to come through both in myself and in my client. It can be a frightening place at times, frightening because as I relax and allow, I am opening, opening to what ever emerges in me and in another. This opening is vulnerable because I am no longer in control; I am no longer directing the show. Instead, with complete trust in the moment, I am surrendering and willfully choosing to let go and see what happens. It can be exhilarating; it can be terrifying.

this trust is founded
not in arrogance
but in my belief
my commitment
to asking
for higher guidance
to asking
that my mind and understanding
my hearing and my listening
my speaking and my silence
be used as a tool
as a way
to help manifest truth
and I don't know
what else
I could rely on

Therapy happens heart to heart and unfolds according to its own inner process which is not predictable. The better we can be at letting go of self-preoccupation, the more successful we will be in creating good conditions for it. There is no novelty in my conclusion that the fundamental healing principles are love and understanding. Our task is to eliminate the barriers to them within ourselves.
David Brazier⁹⁷

How do I eliminate the barriers to love and understanding in myself?
do you know how to receive love?
will you let yourself truly receive love?
are you worthy?
can you open?
be vulnerable?

love. what a word. this poor four letter word has been victimized...objectified...misunderstood...
we grow to learn how to love.

Is love about surrender? I believe it is when we can allow ourselves to feel worthy of love insofar that we can be secure in allowing ourselves to surrender to the moment. By this I don't necessarily mean that we feel worthy of the love of another person, but rather, worthy of owning a rightful place in the universe. It is the sense that we are loved and worthy, simply by the fact that we are here. Perhaps it is when we are able to surrender our need to fix, our need to control, our need to fill our own needs, that we can make room for spirit, which could also be referred to as love, to flow through us.

What does it mean to surrender exactly? What does it look like when you're surrendering? When I consider this notion of surrender, I am struck by an inherent paradox that exists within two terms, 'activity' and 'passivity', that I feel are related to the process. I want to look at these terms beyond their everyday accepted definitions, to

something more akin to describing a state of being, or perhaps even, a state of the soul. In our everyday usage of the term, 'activity' refers primarily to a state of being active, most commonly in the physical sense. Passivity, on the other hand, refers most commonly to a state of inactivity, a state of rest or even lethargy. To turn these terms inside out, I want to suggest that although one can appear active, inwardly one can be passive. We are seemingly active, and yet our actions keep us passive, passive to the real activity necessary to fulfill real potential. The activity necessary for self-confrontation, I believe, is potentially so threatening to our sense of identity and normalcy, that it remains simpler to run from the present.

For example: in session, a counsellor may be actively advising, probing, and clarifying. However, if inwardly, this counsellor is unaware of the motivations of his or her actions, if his or her actions are actually fulfilling an agenda aimed at satisfying a need of feeling in control or 'expert' at what he or she is doing, then ultimately the activity in which he or she is engaged, is passive. Contrarily, a counsellor outwardly may appear to be passive, may appear to be offering little, but if his or her discerned appraisal of the situation indicates that the client needs space to discover his or her own resources, then ultimately the counsellor's activity is active. Real activity, in my opinion, arises from an allowing, a discerning, and a surrendering of control, so that the process may unfold in its own time.

active
doesn't mean control
doesn't mean having the right answers
doesn't mean you're the expert
active
is about how you live
to help another
help themselves

passive
doesn't mean doing nothing
doesn't mean you've got nothing to say
doesn't mean you're watching it roll by
passive
is about how you impose
on another
enabling them
to stay right where they are

Real activity then, is about being active in alignment with a discerned and courageous attunement to the demands of the moment. It is about careful listening of oneself and one's motivations, so to engage openly and receive a person completely as they are. I believe that it is akin to the state that Rogers describes, one in which he is able to allow the process to unfold as it should, without needing to have control of the situation. My sense, however, is that as human beings we search for absolutes. We like to know that there is a "right" thing to do in any given situation. Yet this need to "do the right thing", although admirable, can at times be what ultimately suffocates our engagement with the process. We are always in process, always in the process of becoming. Our 'self' is never fixed, but constantly emerging. So too are we not looking to create a fixed and solid self for another but rather accompany them in their process of acknowledgement that life is a process.

The goal of therapy is not that a person establish a strong and predictable self. The goal is that the person become flowing, flexible, responsive and spontaneous: that they move from stasis to process.

David Brazier⁹⁸

We must remember that as the goal for the client is to become flowing, flexible, responsive and spontaneous, we too must flow. Somehow professional titles can serve to fix identities. I am the counsellor, therefore I am x, y, and z. It is when we think of counselling as a role we 'put on' that it runs the risk of becoming a defined identity.

The healer status is bestowed upon the individual by his or her society. As such, professional degrees for the practice of psychotherapy, including their credentials and academic requirements, are forms of social sanction. However, too much attention is often paid to the professional training of therapists and not enough to their personal formation. (...) It is for the therapist -as it is for everyone else- the issue of being and becoming, insofar as the therapist can help a patient grow only as much as he, himself, has grown. That is why what really matters is not schools of psychotherapy, but the psychotherapists themselves. Although one's theory is generally reflected in the particular modality he or she chooses to practice, "the person" of the therapist overrides both theory and school to which he or she is attached.

T. Byram Karasu⁹⁹

We are people who are counsellors. That does not imply that the client and the counsellor are the same, although they are to the degree that they are both people-in-process and in this sense in every way equal. What is different when we are engaged in counselling is that we are there to contain the experience of the other, not impose on it. We are flexible containers.

Perhaps the hardest thing to do in counselling is to contain, witness, and accompany another through their grief, without providing them with answers. As we

learn to trust ourselves, we have to trust that the inner wisdom of our client will reveal itself once the answers are not forthcoming from outside of him or herself.

remember
the answers are not yours to give
the ambiguity
is the natural state
acknowledge
the anxiety
the desire to fix
to take away the pain
and do not rob another
of the gift

My sense is that a client enters counselling with the inner wisdom required to heal themselves.

I believe
in our most natural state
we are all healers
heal thyself is
to know thyself
know thyself is
to face the fear
of being alive

Our society, however, conditions us to believe that our answers lie outside of ourselves in the eternal escape of the present. As a counsellor, to provide an answer to another's question is perhaps to diminish the depth to which he or she could delve within him or herself.

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them now...Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.
Rainer Maria Rilke¹⁰⁰

An example:

She is courageous, this woman, and I respect and admire her rigorous commitment to honesty. She came in, sat down and looked awkward like she didn't want to be there. She played with the zipper on her knapsack, unable to look me in the eye after we had worked together for months. I was aware of her discomfort, her reluctance, and so instead of asking her how her week had been, I named it:

"You seem really uncomfortable being here today."

"Ya. So how are you?"

"Are you asking because you don't want me to ask you the same thing?"

She laughed nervously and kept playing with her knapsack zipper. I waited. I thought I could probe, push her to tell me what was going on, but if I just waited, quietly, it would emerge. She continued:

"I want to ask you a question...but no, I can't."

Again I waited. The urge to console her was strong, to let her know that whatever it was she wanted to ask was okay, but I resisted. I couldn't rescue her from whatever she was feeling; she had to find the courage to speak when she was ready. I sat,

uncertain, somehow always uncertain if this is what counselling is, but nevertheless I chose to trust the silence. After a few minutes which seemed like hours in their awkwardness she asked:

“Anne, do you think I’m gay?”

She blurted it out, laughing, embarrassed, but meeting my eyes in her confusion, her discomfort. In that moment I felt like I’d been hit by a tidal wave, boom, she’s looking to me to answer this. And because my tendency is to want to please, to want to help, I am always struck by my initial desire to answer direct questions to alleviate another’s discomfort. Instead, I paused, looking for the words, the words that could respond to such a query. And I thought, obviously, if she is asking me, she is asking herself, and so I responded:

“You are asking the question...what do you think?”

“I know, I know...you can’t answer it. But I just don’t know what to think.”

By now she had moved her knapsack out of reach and was facing me directly, engaged. I was thinking, where do we go from here? No wait, it is not for me to decide, wait it out, see what happens. She shared her feelings, her confusion. We explored together the label “gay”, what it meant to her. What labels mean at all. We explored her feelings for women, and her feelings for men.

“When I am with a woman I feel whole, but I am aggressive. Also I don’t feel comfortable going too far, like, I don’t want them to do anything to me. I’m only comfortable with a man doing those things to me, but I don’t feel whole when I’m with a man.”

I'm thinking that this is very complex and I don't have the answers for her. I don't know if she is gay, straight, bisexual, or otherwise. I don't know what is right for her. What I do know is that she has been working extremely hard over the past few months to strengthen her sense of self and has been making strides in beginning to assert herself with others and having her voice heard, albeit, quietly. Something is telling me that perhaps these feelings now are a part of this exploration...that there is no either/or...that she is in process. We explored further her feelings with women and men, what emerges for her when she is with them and why she thinks certain feelings emerge. Because of our long working history together, I wondered to myself whether her "wholeness" and aggression with women was in part due to a desire for connection with herself, and with her mother, and whether her feelings with men was in part due to her internalized perception of herself through the eyes of her father. I chose not to share my feelings. I didn't want to give what had yet to emerge in her. I respond:

"What if the questions you're asking are part of this process you've undertaken to explore and understand yourself? What if in asking the questions you are one step closer to understanding?"

Something lights in her eyes and she smiles. She responds:

"Ya. Maybe I just need to be with this and see where it goes. It is okay not to know. I could say I'm gay and marry a man in ten years. I don't know."

This excerpt does not capture the extent of this session by any means. For along with her questioning her sexuality, we have been exploring her allowing herself to explore. Her question, however, was obviously one that I could not answer. The question

was sitting on the surface of an immense amount of material that needed exploring.

Perhaps when our clients question us it is symbolic of a last attempt to avoid the work of confrontation. If we were to just give them the answer, they wouldn't have to face their confusion and the challenging task of accepting themselves.

This client that I have just shared, worked with me from the very beginning of my practicum, up until its completion. For the majority of her life she has been afraid to express herself, afraid to have an opinion. Over the time that we have been together she has, with tremendous courage, slowly begun to emerge from beneath the weight of an identity contrived to meet the exacting demands of an emotionally dysfunctional family. Her questions are often angry: "Why? Why do people do what they do? Why aren't people kind to each other? How are you supposed to do this life thing? How do you do it?" As I told her, her questions have been my questions.

I tried to comfort her with the notion of process and that the questions can not always be answered. There were moments when I felt as though I had no idea what to say, that the complexity of the situation was such that no easy answer could be provided. Yet what I did do, was wait and listen. I did not rush in and speak out of my anxiety to solve her distress. I did not rescue her although there are times that I'd like to take her in my arms and hold her and tell her "You're doing alright. You are doing so alright." But I took the time to listen to myself, I even closed my eyes at times, and waited until something emerged that had a ring of truth, love, and comfort to it. Perhaps all that we can ever do is to remind others that we all experience the anxiety of the process at times..the desire to know..the desire for certainty...and more often than not we are not left with answers, but more questions.

I think we were both tentative in our early days, but over time, her willingness to trust me, to explore deeply, and to commit to herself, brought us together in a unique way. If we weren't in a counsellor/client relationship, I might go so far to suggest that she felt like a kindred spirit. We just connected in a way that was special and rewarding to both of us. It was she who suggested that our time should draw to a close; she felt that she was coping well, and I agreed. The way in which we explored, laughed, and cried, will stay with me always.

you
I am so amazed
by you
you who began
this journey
with me
at my beginning
you
who has
never missed an appointment
who has never failed
to process
to return
with new thoughts, feelings, ideas
that built on our process
you who began
uncertain
afraid
depressed
deeply angry
and thought it was
on account of your hormones
you would regularly
say my name
Anne
keeping me present
you were ripe
so ripe to work
so ripe to question
to rage
to expose

to be real
like a little girl
trapped in a young woman's body
you asked me
if it was okay
that you were trying to get to know yourself
if it was okay
that you were angry
if it was okay
that you hated your father
and all that he had done
you began to say
I think it's okay...
your voice over the months
has strengthened
has blossomed
has sprung to life
with a vengeance
for you have found your strength
in your own goodness
your own desire
to help yourself
so to help others
your grief is not gone
but you now
understand better
the choice
of how to hold it
it's as if your dignity
has awoken
has taken hold
and you have a new voice
that no longer asks for permission
but expresses
with strength
your new found
belief in you
but the road was long
and you risked
again and again
crying
ranting
questioning
with intensity
the injustice
I have witnessed
your struggle

your angst
your outrage
I have felt
your frustration
your desire
your goodness
I have shared
my witnessing
of your strength
your wisdom
your courage
and somehow
we have arrived
at your departure
and now
what is left
is for me
to say
thank you.
Thank you.

thank you
for I am deeply grateful
thank you
for your courage
thank you
for joining me
on this journey
for our paths
are now eternally
intertwined
and I will never
forget
you

you
I am amazed
by you.

Although she might not be willing to believe it yet, this client healed herself. If I told her that she would likely say, “No I didn’t, it was you that helped me!” Yet she was always working, always seeking to understand, and although we engaged often in discussion, many times I would just listen to her unravel her own riddles. Listening can be a radical act. Listening with interest, eye contact, and empathy, is a gift that is perhaps becoming more scarce in today’s world.

I do not know if you have ever examined how you listen, it doesn't matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind in the leaves, to the rushing waters, or how you listen in a dialogue with yourself, to your conversation in various relationships with your intimate friends, your wife or husband....

If we try to listen we find it extraordinarily difficult, because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our background, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate we hardly listen at all to what is being said..

In that state there is no value at all. One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of attention, a state of silence, in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me, it is possible to communicate.....real communication can only take place where there is silence.

Krishnamurti ¹⁰¹

Have you ever needed to talk to someone? To really confide in someone? To bare your soul, tell your all, speak your mind, your heart? And if you have, have you ever noticed that it wasn't really advice you were looking for? That you didn't really want them to tell you what to do...you just wanted to be heard? Remember that sometimes listening in itself is healing. Just being there unconditionally is sometimes enough. Sometimes we just want to test our voices, to test the truth of our souls on another and

simply remain accepted. As they accept us, we can begin to accept ourselves.

Listening requires us to not only hear the words, but also to hear the silences. I am becoming more comfortable with silence in session. I am learning to trust it, to befriend it. I am learning that silence makes room, room for another to rise and meet the silence. I am learning to not rush in, to not fill the gaps, to not fulfill my desire of alleviating the anxiety in the room, the anxiety that arises from my desire to make it all better, soothe the pain.

there are times
when the pain is intense
and the energy in the room
becomes thick
I can't take it away
but what I have done
is reached out with my energy alone
and embraced them
in silence

Sitting in silence is sitting in the moment and allowing all that can arise to emerge. It is trusting: trusting myself, trusting my client, trusting the moment, to reveal where the next moment lies.

I have learned over time
to wait
when I'm not sure what to say

inevitably
the silence gives them room
to say more
alot of what goes on
occurs in the space between words
in what is left unsaid

Silence is about learning to listen, not just with our ears, but with our hearts, our intuition, our spirits. There is an outer and an inner quality of listening. We listen to our clients, we listen to ourselves and what surfaces within us. We listen to discern what the moment requires next.

listen

listen to the rhythm
it sings to your soul
in the sound of the wind
in the cries of sea birds over water
in the waves that ceaselessly caress the sands of time
the hollow call of the whale
mysterious and profound
listen
let the waves wash your soul
wash the ache the fatigue the fear
soothing the breath
as it deepens
hear: here is the all
within you
in every breath
that leads to an inner space
hollowed out
hallowed out
lose your fear
and imagine your breath
cleansing
relaxing
purifying

listen

Each client, I realize, is a gift, and when I reflect back on the clients that I saw over the past year each one has taught me something. This last client that I will share taught me about space and about learning how to gently listen.

She told me that she was depressed. She looked depressed. Sallow and wan, her face was almost transparent-looking in its paleness. When she first began counselling with me, she would never meet my eyes. She seemed to wear the weight of her commitments on her back, as her shoulders always slumped forward into her lap. The room would become quiet, and I would patiently wait for her to begin to emerge.

quietly you

with downcast eyes
fumbling with her keys
twisting her ring
she spoke softly
like a small child
afraid of life
she couldn't look at me
as she spoke of missing classes
being behind on assignments
unable to get out of bed
it was our first time together
and I simply reflected
paced what she offered
wondering what to do
she spoke of being a disappointment
to her parents, her professors, her family
and I wondered
what has happened to this young woman
this girl
that she feels so apologetic

about being here?
about being alive?
I matched her quietness
and moved gently
she was a pale flower
that would bruise easily

the room was quiet
as if listening
teasing out
the story
with patience
I was forward
leaning
reaching
with my heart
in silence
without deciding to
it was unconscious
I noticed
that I was
reaching my energy around her
enclosing her
in acceptance
offering a place
of comfort
where there was no room
to disappoint
and in this beginning
this quiet
careful
beginning
an alliance
was formed

space.

I have wondered at length about this notion of space, in that, I as a counsellor, need to make space in which the client can reside. The most remarkable moment for me with this client, was when I noticed that somehow my energy was reaching out and supporting her, embracing her and containing the space. It wasn't a conscious decision to do this, but rather it seemed that my inner wisdom? my higher mind? my intuition? was working prior to any cognitive response on my part. Perhaps this is similar to what Carl Rogers was referring to when he remarked that when he allowed himself to go into the immediacy of a relationship with a client, his total organism would take over, and his responses would reflect an unconscious reaction to his living of the relationship.¹⁰²

Insofar as the therapist is content and at peace, they will find it easier to avoid becoming judgemental. Insofar as they overcome self-centered concern, they will find it easier to stay with the client. Insofar as they live in the present and are free from serious preoccupation with their own past and future, they will find it easier to flow with the client. Insofar as we are free from these contaminating influences, there will be space which is safe for us and safe for the client. The therapist needs to create the same kind of inner space which the client is trying to find. Therapist and client are on the same path.
David Brazier¹⁰³

Presence

Being present with another requires that I am first present with myself.

Being present with myself means that I am tuning into what goes in my heart and head.

Being present with myself means that I am seeing what goes on in my heart and head and then letting it go.

Being present is letting go and constantly returning to the here and now.

Being present with another is giving the room in myself that I have allowed by tuning in, seeing, and letting go.

Being present with another is containing them while giving them space to grow.

When I feel as though I am embodying a quality of presence with another, I experience it much as I have experienced meditation except instead of watching the thoughts flow within my own mind, I am watching them flow between us. The thoughts, sensations, noises, appear in my consciousness, I acknowledge them and return to my breath. My breath allows me to be here and now. It allows me to wait and respect the inherent wisdom, power, and mystery of the moment without rushing in. Nevertheless, I wonder how I can create and cultivate this space within, while also having a constant awareness of what is happening within me. It is a paradoxical situation in some respects, for ultimately I want to acknowledge what is occurring within me so that I can continually return to the present, but as I am engaged in this process within myself, I am not engaged in the present with my client. Or am I? In my readings on meditation and its application to the therapeutic process, I have come across a description of this process that seems to make sense to me. For ultimately I can never completely remove myself from the situation, all that I can do is have awareness of my internal processes.

In meditation (particularly of the mindfulness type), there is no attempt to “figure out” emotions. Instead the meditator acknowledges emotions as they are, which eventually allows him to connect directly with a more transpersonal dimension of emotional energy.
John Wellwood¹⁰⁴

Meditative practices can overlap nicely with the counselling endeavour in that I am reminded of the flow of thoughts and feelings that are available, but I am not necessarily required to latch on to any particular one. The thoughts and feelings are an aspect of myself, but they are not all that there is. If I can acknowledge them and let them

go, and then wait even for an instant, I find that I am often guided as to where to go or what to say (or what not to say).

In order to be an effective therapist, therefore, one needs, at least at the moment of the therapeutic encounter, to be empty, clean and open to the flow of whatever may arise from the bottomless ocean, willing to observe each phenomenon clearly: neither attached nor rejecting
David Brazier¹⁰⁵

When I have achieved this with a client in session, a kind of resonance has occurred, a flow. It is difficult to describe in large part due to the limitations of language. There is a timelessness about it, as if this moment, this sharing, this small portion of life, is being given the respect that it deserves.

*One instant is eternity;
eternity is the now.
When you see through this one instant,
you see through the one who sees.*
Wu-men Hui-k'ai (1183-1260)¹⁰⁶

When I feel the flow, it's almost as if I feel hollow. Not hollow in a sad and empty way, but hollow in a way that is allowing whatever is most healing in our universe to flow through me. I feel as though I am a conduit, a vessel, an open space. I visualize this in such a way that my body is no longer composed of organs, bones, and muscle, but rather an empty glowing space.

Yet even as I walk out of being in session with someone, I never fully know if I've done or said "the right thing". I can turn to my colleagues and supervisors and explore with them what I have said or done, yet rarely will they tell me that I've done the right thing. In fact, if anything, I find that they ask me more questions, such as "why did you do/say this?" or "how did that make you feel?" or "what did that raise in you?"

how do you know if you've done the right thing?
do you have the courage to ask? to share?
being effective doesn't mean having all the right moves
all the time
being effective is being able to expose
just as you ask your clients to
your insecurity
about getting it right
supervision
requires us
to reflect-in-relation
self-in-relation
to reflect
as we listen to our words
enter the ears of another
and discern for ourselves
our motivations

In the supervisory process I am once again plummeted into my self-reflection and my need to learn to trust that my own judgements arise from a discerned process. For no matter what, I have determined that I am ultimately alone. The decisions I make and the responsibility that I have to another is mine.

Although I strive in session to center myself, surrender my need to control, become aware of my inner and outer forms of listening, have the courage to trust what

emerges and speak from a discerned and responsive state, there will be times when I will be thrown off center by the material presented by my client. In these times, I may falter, become fearful, uncertain of what to do, and what to say. I may react rather than respond.

The gift of these moments is that each time I am thrown off center I am brought to a place where I can look and reflect upon what has arisen in me and learn something new about myself. Each time this happens, I have the choice to meet this challenge with honesty and courage; to turn within and seek to understand. When I am able to do this, I provide myself with one more experience, one more piece of understanding that I can bring back to my practice. It may be the one that allows me to connect and be with a client authentically.

and if I was to tell you
that there are days when I wake up
feeling uncomfortable in my own skin
would that make me less of a counsellor?
or more?

for I am engaged in a endless process
of learning to love myself
which at times
can feel so close I can taste it
and at others
can feel like its always out of reach

and when its close
its when I am connected
not just with me
but with what flows through me

and when its far
its when I'm focused
not on the All
but on some particular

some detail
that I deem unacceptable

it is the judgement that kills
which snuffs the light
leaving only a smoking wick
in a dark cavity

and if I was to tell you
that there are days when I wake up
feeling uncomfortable in my own skin
would that make me less of a counsellor?

or more?

Endings and beginnings:

I have arrived at the end of this exploration which in many respects is merely another beginning. At the start of this document, I stated that “this is the beginning of the beginning of the beginning for I find that I am in a continual process of beginning this work.” The work of which I speak, is not this document per se, but rather, the unending investigation and exploration of myself; myself-in-relation to others; and particularly, myself-in-relation to the practice of counselling. Having come to the end, I see that where I am is merely within a never-ending process. Beginnings imply endings, however, and like everything else, the ending of this work provides an opportunity for reflection.

My goal for this work was to describe, in phenomenological terms, the various manifolds of meaning through which my immediate experience of myself-in-relation to counselling presents itself. This stance describes a process that strives to reach features of this phenomenon that it would be inconceivable for it to be without. In reflecting on the underlying questions that began this work, I feel that I have made an honest attempt to explore their meanings deeply and as such I have arrived at what I feel are some possible answers. The answers reflect my understanding of where I am today. As I gain in experience and self-knowledge, I anticipate the answers to alter, perhaps subtly, perhaps radically, to reflect my understanding as it deepens. However, my answers to these questions serve to illustrate at present what I have come to regard as the essential features of the phenomenon of myself-in-relation to counselling. I will present again each question that began this work followed by the answer which I arrived at as a result of my exploration:

-How can I best help another to help him or herself?

Helping another cannot be done without helping oneself. In helping myself, I learn that to grow I must possess the courage to face myself and grow through my pain to a more authentic state of being. Helping another consists in helping him or her to turn and face him or herself in a non-judgemental environment which can exist because I have engaged in this same process.

-What do I need to be working on in myself so to be most present with another?

To be present with another requires that I can be present with myself. Being present with myself requires that I become aware of where I am here and now, listening carefully to what emerges in myself and my client. Being present is having the sensitivity to listen and trust my inner voice, and have the courage to speak its truth. My work with cultivating therapeutic presence resides around a need to become increasingly attentive to my breathing, my body, and my spirit.

-How can I meet another in such a way that I am supporting growth and not enabling dependence?

When I objectify my client, perceiving him or her as a thing to be 'fixed', not only am I merely looking after my own needs, I am enabling him or her to remain in a pattern of seeking answers from outside of him or herself as our culture seems to promote. Contrarily, when I am able to meet my client in an authentic way, which requires me to be vulnerable and open to the process, my client remains subject and together we explore

the nature of his or her dilemma. In this manner, my client begins to learn how to not fear his or her inner wisdom, but how to voice it and trust its guidance.

-How can I be most authentic with myself and with another as a counsellor?

Authenticity to me, is the ability to be oneself without fear. It is about the turn within so to acknowledge and accept our limitations and the ability to rise above our self-judgement to see ourselves as a self-in-process. Being authentic with myself requires that I engage in careful self-honesty, where I am willing to acknowledge my fear and uncertainty and examine their origins. Being authentic as a counsellor requires that I am willing to be honest with myself, with my clients, and with my supervisors. Being authentic is not about knowing oneself well enough that one can always 'do it right'. Rather, being authentic is about being willing to expose what one does in order to better learn how to 'do it right'.

-How should I deal with my uncertainties, fears, and trepidations, in the taking on of this privilege of listening to and witnessing the life of another?

The fears and trepidations are a result of my lack of experience and my inability to fully trust myself and my inner wisdom. My sense is that when I am trying to be a "good" counsellor so to alleviate my fears, I get in my own way. My experience has been that when I can surrender this need to control my feelings, and instead trust myself, my client, and the process which moves through us, I am no longer fearful. The privilege of listening to and witnessing the life of another is immense; I can best contain this

experience when I have consciously chosen to remain open and connected to that which is greater than I. In this way the responsibility is not all mine: it is part mine, part my client's, and part the responsibility of the life force which moves and contains us all. As I contain, so am I contained.

Through the writing of this work and my engagement with the above questions, I have come to a better understanding of the essential features of the phenomenon of myself-in-relation to counselling. Beyond theory and strategy, I am my own source of experience, knowledge, and wisdom. The more I am able to accept, confront, and love myself, the more I will be able to offer this to my client.

The guidelines which I borrowed and integrated from autobiographical forms of self-study research, arts-informed (life history) research, narrative inquiry, phenomenological inquiry, and alternative ethnographic inquiry, have informed and directed the process of this work. These criteria were as follows: that the work possess verisimilitude; that it has aesthetic merit; that it is driven by a moral commitment; and that it possesses a holistic quality. At this point, I will now answer to each of these guidelines, relating how I attempted to uphold their criteria.

-Does the work possess verisimilitude?

Verisimilitude is a term used to describe a quality of expression that is credible, authentic, and enables connection for the reader. Throughout this work I have been committed to reproducing in text an honest representation of my personal experience. My commitment to this end has been twofold. First, I believe that honesty is powerful and

recognizable to others. When something rings true it hits us at a level where we recognize an authentic engagement with real issues. I wanted readers to be able to hear clearly the questions with which I struggled and the intense emotions that often coloured my experience. In this act of disclosing I am enabling a connection with the reader so that they may resonate with my experience in a way that is perhaps helpful, or even comforting to them. Second, the intention of this work was not merely to illustrate my process, but was in itself the fruit of my process. To not commit wholly to being honest with myself and the work, would be to rob myself of the full potential of engaging with this process. This work was about self-development, and I developed myself through engaging with it.

-Does the work have aesthetic merit?

The aesthetic merit of a work refers to its ability to not only make creative use of language, but also that the work allows for interpretation and the promotion of insight. My hope is that I have achieved these criteria in two different ways. First, I must ask myself, how does one promote interpretation and insight? Perhaps these two qualities are promoted not through simply providing answers, but rather by asking questions. In the Socratic method, a student is led to discover what is true for him or her, by the carefully worded questions of the teacher. In this way, the student discovers for him or herself, an understanding based on his or her own experience allowing for the promotion of his or her own interpretation and insight. Although I have sought to answer the many questions that underly this work, the answers to which I have come are mine and are indicative of

my development at present. The questions still stand both for me and for the reader who chooses to engage with them as I feel that they are fundamental to the practice of counselling. In this regard, my hope is that the reader may be led in his or her own process of interpreting how these questions relate to his or her own development as a counsellor.

The second way in which I hope this work has served to promote interpretation and insight is via the format of the text itself. The inner voice selections, represented in the poetic style, intended to represent the inner voice of reflection and the non-linear way in which this voice can present itself. These selections, as already stated earlier, issued from me in a direct and intuitive manner allowing for the most accurate representation that I could present. My feeling is that there is a spaciousness about their quality in that their full meaning is not explicitly stated. Although this wasn't necessarily intentional, as my intention was merely to write them directly as I perceived them, my impression is that in not making their full meaning explicit, the reader is required to bring his or her own understanding to these selections. In this regard, my hope is that the reader was challenged to draw on his or her own experience and hence gain insight from reading the rendition of mine.

-Is the work driven by a moral commitment?

A work driven by a moral commitment strives to promote learning and growth not only in its author, but also in those who read it. The underlying purpose of this work was to explore certain fundamental questions that had arisen in me pertaining to myself

and myself-in-relation to counselling. This purpose is directly related to my desire to better know and understand myself so that I can be of better service to others. As I have stated several times, I believe that I am ethically obligated to my clients, to be engaged in an ongoing practice of self-reflection and development. This work is the fruit of my engagement with this practice. Further, my hope is that in the reading of this work by others, particularly by beginning counsellors like myself, they may be impelled to engage with the questions I pose so to further develop their own self-reflective practice.

-Does the work possess a holistic quality?

A work possessing a holistic quality is characterized by its ability to maintain throughout a sense of the whole so that the reader does not become lost in the particular details. As my intention was to explore the manifold of appearances in which the phenomenon of myself-in-relation to counselling presents itself, my hope is that although there were several questions and themes explored, it was nevertheless evident that they all related to this underlying purpose. From the very beginning, through the presentation of questions, the discussion of methodology, the account of the evolution of the topic, the presentation of the literature that led me, and the body of the work which explored the questions supported by the ideas of those whose literature I turned to, I have sought to maintain an underlying sense of the purpose which guided this work. My hope is that for the reader, this underlying purpose was ever-present in the elucidation of the details which comprised it.

Having reflected on the guidelines with which I set out, my personal opinion is that I worked hard to uphold them. Nevertheless, as I stated when I set these guidelines out, it is for the reader to critically reflect on how well this was accomplished. I can only assert with confidence that as this work is a product of the engagement with self-development that I deem so essentially important, my intention throughout was to produce the best and most honest work that I was able.

As I come to this the final paragraph of this work, I want to say thank you for accompanying me through this process. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to explore deeply and honestly my experience as a beginning counsellor, in a thesis that represents the culmination of this first stage of my education. In ending this stage of my training, I am aware that this ending marks another beginning of exploring in new ways through new experiences, the questions that I carry with me. And so I continue.

the story can never be completely told
the experience never completely given
the spaces that move through the words
carry the meaning on which they depend

I could not tell you my complete story
for I could not recreate here in words
all that was experienced in me, in them
but the evocation through what has been left unsaid
is for you to create
it is always yours to bring to life

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