Eigentlichkeit (owned-ness/authenticity) and therapy with an uninvited guest

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Working with clients, supervisees and myself I notice a particular quality of felt sense that can arrive. I have found concepts from Heidegger help me to understand it - the moment when a step beyond just being-in-the-world (Befindlichkeit) is possible/necessary, when the unpalatable must also be 'owned'-up to (Eigentlichkeit). In this session I will invite you to sample these felt senses, to notice resonances from several contexts and to consider ways a therapist may be helpful when it is encountered.

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The challenge of Eigentlichkeit

In this session I will set out a concept from Heidegger – Eigentlichkeit, illustrate some felt senses where it has been meaningful for me and then draw out four themes from that experience and their relevance in therapy. My aim is to stimulate crossings with your own experience. Therefore whilst I hope that what I say will make sense to you, it is more important that you take time to notice where my experience crosses with yours – resonating and maybe opening up new perspectives. Please don’t expect too much of my Heidegger scholarship, I have been inspired by his ideas but don’t claim to be an expert.

Let me begin with a poem - Talking In Bed by Philip Larkin

Talking in bed ought to be easiest,
Lying together there goes back so far,
An emblem of two people being honest.

Yet more and more time passes silently.
Outside, the wind’s incomplete unrest
Builds and disperses clouds in the sky,
And dark towns heap up on the horizon.
None of this cares for us. Nothing shows why
At this unique distance from isolation

It becomes still more difficult to find
Words at once true and kind,
Or not untrue and not unkind.

I wonder what response you have to the poem? Part of you may see good reason to reject it - another example of Larkin’s familiar dour melancholy. Surely life can be better than that! However, another part may allow the discomfort, even perhaps own-up to knowing this sort of insecurity. I invite you to note your reaction(s). The last line is particularly important for me - seeking both

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truthfulness (an inhabited honesty - authenticity) and kindness (a personal investment – owning up to a situation), yet maybe realising that not everything fits and some compromise may be needed. I also mention the middle section, the disquieting, lowering presence of the ‘wind’s complete unrest’ and the ‘dark towns’ that ‘heap up on the horizon’. It is as if there is someone or something else at hand, external reality experienced as an uninvited presence.

I came across Heidegger’s term Eigentlichkeit from a philosophical article on trauma. It appears to be usually translated in two slightly contrasting ways - as ‘authenticity’ or ‘own-ness’. Apparently eigentlich, means ‘really’ or ‘truly’, but is built on the stem eigen, meaning ‘own’ or ‘proper’. So perhaps ‘ownedness’ might be better, implying the idea of owning up to and owning what one is and does.

Heidegger’s broad suggestion is that, however much we feel in charge of our own destinies, much of life is also shaped by a context we just have to deal with, indeed which always entangles us. Without prior consent we are ‘thrown-into’ the constraints of human life (e.g., being mortal, being-with-others, being embodied) and ‘thrown into’ our particular history (e.g., social circumstances, relationships, culture, language). The process of making something of that predicament is therefore crucial for each of us. It was simply set out by the philosopher John Haugeland in a catch phrase, that seems to be delivered with a sigh:

‘Well, I guess we’ll just have to go on from here’

At any point a human being finds himself at a particular place (“from here”) and like it or not (“we have to...”) will be influenced by it (“...go on”). This particular part of Heidegger’s thinking (Befindlichkeit) seems to have been very influential for Gendlin. You could describe focusing in these terms as that very particular process of tuning in to a specific situation and what going-on-from-here might mean – an owned being-in-the-world. Here focusing contrasts strongly with other, rather familiar patterns – stickiness (not going on at all), delusion (trying to go on from somewhere else) and what Gendlin calls ‘vivisection’ (one part goes on, others are left behind).

To me Eigentlichkeit is a focusing step, but a particular one. It demands a particular close and personal way of being-in-the-world – both authentically truthful to a situation and owning-up to it. When Gendlin comments on Heidegger’s authenticity he emphasises this situational (Befindlichkeit), interlinked and interaffecting quality. Thus, ‘authenticity is a process carried forward in the present’, which fundamentally distinguishes it from merely living up to one’s potential. It matters how we relate:

‘Our being, in Heidegger’s view, is always being affected and that is how we find ourselves. We are the living-in events with-others, our being rides on the events, is dispersed in what happens, is the being-in what happens. Only in so finding ourselves, can we constantly retrieve ourselves, so that there is a present in which our capacity to be is again and again our own. That is authenticity.’

So, to summarise, here is my grasp of Eigentlichkeit which I started to notice in my life and practice with clients:

- Situations may challenge me to offer a distinctive kind of truthfulness and personal investment. They shape me and I shape them. My response matters.
- Such authenticity implies facing up to that which I have not chosen and may not be able to manage, but that in owning it I may be carried forward and find myself.
- That something fundamentally threaten may enable me to be retrieved from an inauthentic place.
Three stories and their felt senses

In the next part I will tell three stories that have seemed to cross with the senses of *Eigentlichkeit* described above (or perhaps the other way around). Later on I will draw out themes that seem to be significant and talk about reservations. Just now I would like to invoke the felt senses that have arisen and invite you to see what arises when the tales are told.

**Andy and the cardboard box**

The first story concerns a gentleman now in his late 60s who came into therapy because of repeated sexual abuse he had suffered around the age of eight years old. Somehow Andy had blocked the existence of this abuse entirely from his awareness for something like 50 years. Then out of the blue smells had triggered awful memories and his life had become dominated by intrusive flashbacks and nightmares. Shortly before I first met him, Andy had attempted suicide and nearly succeeded.

Our work together had followed the normal phases of trauma therapy with a focusing-oriented flavour. The nightmares abated and, whilst he continues to be surprised by flashbacks and the stinging new insights they bring, he has achieved a lot. (He even devised a personal version of the flashback protocol which he threatens to patent!)

Latterly Andy has been preoccupied with trying to trace the perpetrator of his abuse, a close neighbour when he was a child. Whilst there are no intentions to inflict vengeance, or even contact him, Andy wants to know what happened to him and particularly if he is still alive. I noticed a degree of compulsion about this felt sense and, connecting to it, he found a distinctive metaphor - a cardboard box. Imagine, he explained, that you are afraid of spiders and before you is a box that might, or might not, contain a spider. He said that the process of tracing the perpetrator is like choosing to put your hand into the cardboard box to see if a spider is there!

So here is the felt sense I notice – he uses words about taking control but to me the gesture seems more about discovering an implicit capability. Years ago a child was thrown-into danger and overwhelmed by it, now, by stepping towards danger, something dispersed may be being discovered again. Andy told me that when younger he had enjoyed rock climbing, relishing the intense concentration that could hold all other thoughts at bay, maybe both immediate fear and unwelcome memories. I wonder if that practice implicitly prepared him for trauma therapy.

**Betty takes stock**

My second story is of a supervisee whose therapy practice is local and, through the internet, international. Every week Betty spends a few days seeing clients in a city several hours travel away. Both she and her partner are successful in different business enterprises, which bring out their very different skills and preoccupations. Yet I suppose I might call them ‘time-poor’ – being regularly parted by professional demands their time together is precious, their different personalities needing individual space.

In a recent conversation Betty let slip an ambivalence about where she found herself. Like the best of felt senses it began with more of a gestural expression, and invoked a picture that may be familiar to those who are in a long-standing committed relationship. A huge part of her is happy to be with a man who is clearly ‘not wired like’ herself. Yet, embarrassingly she also finds herself yearning for someone who naturally sees things in her way, notices her kind of needs and expresses love in behaviour she might employ. It seems that over the years they had tenderly interlaced the strands
of their relationship, but that dropped threads were a more significant part of the pattern than could be normally admitted.

The felt sense seemed distinct, but not necessarily clear – there was a chill in Betty’s pause that followed, one that later reminded me of a Zen garden. Having voiced some of her yearnings, slowly she found herself noting what had been unremarked before and taken for granted – his kindness in practical things, checking the car over before her long journey and filling it with petrol; his easy hugs and verbal affection; his ‘letting me be controlling and bossy and not complaining’; and then every week his welcoming her home ‘without saying anything like I wish you wouldn’t go or I miss you in a way that could be guilt-inducing’.

So here is a felt sense that held both stinging disappointments and an initially grudging appreciation. To some degree there was just turmoil, she was in two or more minds. It seemed that established senses of self were no longer adequate – something had to give, but not without cost. The felt sense reminded me of the chill felt when waking up the morning after a prolonged and wounding marital disagreement. Home truths having been spilled, needs expressed and fears evoked – the landscape can feel bleak, but an opportunity for a different connection has also arisen. The whole picture might have taken a turn for the worse. Yet the felt sense somehow managed to entwine fulfilment, loss, and modest generosity. Betty was able to step forward into and allow herself to be embraced by a changed reality.

**Clive goes to hospital**

Clive’s story is one that in some way may be familiar to many – a 60-something year old man finds he has prostate cancer. It was hardly unexpected – for the 15 years before he had been a regular at the hospital urology department, undergoing monitoring and tests, even some surgery, and getting used to a complaint that reassuringly always turned out to be ‘benign’. Then one day he doesn’t manage to dodge the bullet – the long-anticipated uninvited guest had arrived. No aggressive medical response is prescribed, just ‘active monitoring.’ If the cancer did not show signs of spreading to other organs it is safest to leave it undisturbed.

Clive recounts a variety of felt senses – the first came not in the consultant’s clinic, a bit of blankness there, but later sitting on the bus going home it starts to sink in. He could recall ‘a kind of controlled jittery confusion, the sense of just having lost something unclear but precious, an anticipated road foreshortened.’ He stifled a crossness and the need for a hug.

The muted and controlled quality seems significant here – one part of Clive trying to save himself from the ridiculous indignity of panic, after all it was just a bit of bad news, that’s all! Yet another part, however hidden, was taking the knock, noticing the unshed tears. He said that in a small way he had walked out of the hospital into a different being-in-the-world.

The other felt sense came later as he tried to get his head round the idea of ‘active monitoring.’ A lot of mental wriggling and casting about seemed to have occurred, like a cat finding a way to settle on an unfamiliar cushion. Clive looked for an image to handle this unwelcome reality. He said he needed to work out where to ‘pitch his tent in this uncertain land’, to allow-for his ‘unpredictable stowaway’, accepting him as an unavoidable ‘companion on the road.’

This third story reveals several contrasting felt senses. First there is the fundamental wobble, a stolen degree of steadiness that may not reliably come to hand again. Clive spoke of the temptation to cry out, or cleave to another, for it all to be ‘too much’ so that he could petulantly shake his fist at fate. Yet there is also a thirst for a frame to hold the new reality. Surprisingly after a while he seems
to have become almost comfortable with the image of a ‘stowaway,’ sardonically comparing notes with a pregnant friend about accommodating an unknown stranger. That handle word seems a step forward in itself, somehow an act of determination and self-discovery.

**Resonances and reservations?**

So here I set out my preoccupation with *Eigentlichkeit* in the stories of people struggling to be both kind and true, to own-up to authenticity. I wonder if they resonated with particular moments you may have witnessed in yourself or other people? If so it would be helpful if you were to pause for a moment now to allow those implicit crossings to be pointed out and acknowledged. We don’t need to unpick them just now, or encapsulate them clearly. Just notice their arrival and that something may have shifted as a consequence.

I use a metaphor stolen from the theatre to sum up what I am talking about. Long ago in my last years at school I studied a play by T. S. Eliot that worried away at the moment when a discomforting reality has to be entertained and accommodated with some degree of politeness. A domestic social gathering is portrayed on stage, a small group of friends attending a party that should be convivial and easy. Yet gradually we watch them cope with a perplexing half-explained situation, more than they had bargained on. This is symbolised by the arrival of an extra character, an unidentified and ‘uninvited guest’ whose presence emphasises the personal encounter that is involved. The challenge of my stories has a personal feel that fits the idea of an uninvited guest – something to be approached best in human terms, someone whom we may need to find a way to get along with.

I now often notice this uninvited *Eigentlichkeit* presence in therapy, perhaps with one adjustment. Sometimes the guest is being invited to sit around the table, in other instances they remain unwelcome. From time to time we may even hear a loud banging on the door – but it is ignored.

Now before moving on I want to check back with your felt sense. When you hear my stories and my image to explain the impact of *Eigentlichkeit* does this resonate with you? Or perhaps you may feel there is nothing too exciting here and that you might look at things rather differently. Here are a few reservations that might arise:

**Reservations**

**Hobson’s Choice!** For example in down to earth terms, you might say that however these situations may be dressed up, they each boil down to a person bowing to the inevitable. We might call this *Hobson’s Choice* or in Nietzsche’s terms - the need to *love our destiny*. Take Clive’s medical issue – statistically many men of a certain age get prostate cancer, many survive, some do not. Like it or lump it, his emotional disposition may not alter his chances much. A fly caught on a spider’s web may buzz a bit but usually does not escape.

**Too negative!** Another comment might be that the emphasis is too much on the negative side – that misfortune is best combatted with a positive attitude that looks on the bright side and wastes as little energy as possible on introspection. Andy might be better employed caring for his charity work, his grandchildren, or even his rose garden. Don’t fret or witter, just get on with it!

**Too messy!** A third reaction might be to notice the rather messy quality of the situations described. For example Betty’s current compromise may seem less attractive next week. The tensions she faces will likely work away at her, producing different reactions. Maybe she is avoiding a big choice
in her relationship, a nettle that is better grasped as early as possible. Surely therapy should be clearing the undergrowth rather than fertilising it!

**Dissociation is different!** Finally, those who work with Dissociative Disorders may be uncomfortable that my understanding may inappropriately fudge structural dissociation with more straightforward trauma reactions and much of everyday defences. Whilst I am wishing to point out the significance of several levels of dissociative structures in therapy, I am not referring to structural dissociation in this paper.

**Eigentlichkeit as a pattern**

I must admit that these kind of responses can have more than a superficial attraction sometimes – offering what seem to be clear understandings and active solutions. I too am not always patient! In the next section I will look a little more closely at the aspects of *Eigentlichkeit* as revealed by my illustrations, hopefully suggesting why a more subtle response is justified, with both a practical and a therapeutic eye. All the while if you have reservations it will be helpful to keep them to hand – letting them test what comes next. I want to notice that this tension, the abrasion of intuitions and contradiction illustrates something of the felt sense I am trying to describe. As we discuss *Eigentlichkeit* we may be engaging in it as well – holding insights that may not fit comfortably, that may challenge the way things are seen. How can we be authentic in response, owning up truthfully to our experience? Such steps should be rather familiar to a focusing audience, used to the ways that the implicit can be relied upon to carry forward uncomfortable paradoxes. I am reminded of Gendlin’s admonition not to ‘waste time between two wrong choices’ but rather spend it well getting to another possibility!

**Themes of *Eigentlichkeit***

I will now set out four themes of the felt sense I see in *Eigentlichkeit* – how it arises, what consequences come, how mortality comes into play, what relationship can be had. In doing so I will identify nine therapist challenges that arise. As before the crossings with your experience are the most important – both positive and negative.

**Theme 1 – Pausing with the intolerable**

A first theme concerns the start of the process – the time when avoidance gives way for an intention of authenticity. The uninvited guest in each of my stories is the need to come to terms with an unacceptable reality – the man who sexually abused me as a child, a partner who cannot meet the part of me that feels most precious, the need to co-exist with a disease that may kill me. In a fundamental way, if any of these realities is to be accommodated, then a reshaping of personal identity, security and meaning, my protective ‘worldview’, must take place.

*Clutch it closely and run!* To begin with we might observe that in each case the challenge will have been around for some time. The arrival of Clive’s bogeyman was anticipated at least 15 years ago, yet serious consideration was happily postponed till another day. Betty may have allowed her partner’s other attractions to make the dropped stitches less noticeable. Somehow Andy managed to live most of his life blocking any memory of his abuse from consciousness (although unwittingly it seems to have shaped the person he became). Many and various are the ways people stifle the knocking - endure the existence, often close at hand, of realities that cannot be abided. The nastier the reality, the more determined and oblivious will be the defence. We all know of people who tolerate a threadbare relationship, who keep out of the doctor’s surgery to avoid what he might find, who live their lives under a personal shadow they cannot contemplate. I want to suggest that
those most dangerous, most indigestible realities are clutched closest to each of us. Their existence shapes our shadow and thereby our lives.

Such protective living can be exhausting and from time to time the burden needs to be repositioned to where it will not get in the way. Keeping it out of awareness may require imperious denial, a defensive attack on others, the projection of hurt or blame. (Therapy may be carefully used to reposition burdens rather than address them.) At worst avoidance may require an unwholesome pact with the Devil or the theatrical neediness of Chicken Licken.

**Owning up quietly** So by contrast please note the modest, almost inconspicuous authenticity in the actions of my three people. Larkin's two qualities appear perhaps first in their intentions – a desire to own-up to the situation in some kindly way, a desire for a level of personal truth in the face of it. None are blessed with much confidence in the endeavour, for each the picture remains unclear. Perhaps their most distinctive activity is to stop running and pause. Clive sits on the bus, Andy offers himself to therapy, Betty has a distinctive gesture and a frosty moment. I would suggest that, like all good focusing, a pause opens the space (Abstand), a breath between self and the whole problem, including what is clutched in shameful obscurity, the defensive darkness: “I am here and this is there; yeah, I sense it.” And a new ‘I’ comes there. My experience is that such pauses are rare, but not as rare as might be imagined. The desire for authenticity may be long-cherished and protective forms of living will be costly to maintain. Therefore flashes of pause will occur, a raggedy edge that does not suit the garment, something often quickly brushed aside in embarrassment.

The first therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit is to recognise a client’s authentic pause – a brave if unclear intention. This will be an ambivalent, and maybe a fleeting moment, easy to overlook. Strands of fear and avoidance may obscure a new openness to that which is normally denied. A good deal of zig-zagging may be involved and, as we will see later, this authenticity may only be summoned when other approaches have been tried. Andy’s curiosity about the perpetrator only arose in the latter part of therapy, when immediate work on the trauma was well advanced. Unresolved questions about himself and the perpetrator continued to trouble him and therapy sessions naturally chewed them over. He made a choice to stick with the unpalatable issue.

The therapist is therefore careful to notice how gestures towards truthfulness and ownedness arise and how much they are addressed. To some degree this includes giving attention to that which may be implied but not stated – mere hints of what is being missed. In the initial period therapeutic objectives are modest, to respect client intentions and choice, to notice authentic intentions as they arise, to be a curator of the associated pauses and a willing host to the discomforting vulnerabilities that will follow. Eliot is nevertheless uncompromising about the potential the moment holds:

> ‘And now, when they are stripped naked to their souls
> And can choose, whether to put on proper costumes
> Or huddle quickly into new disguises,
> They have, for the first time, somewhere to start from.’

**Thermos 2 - Inviting the wolf in.**

A second theme looks at the consequences of the intention to own-up. There is an old joke that one way to keep the wolf from the door is to invite him in! Yet how can irreconcilable positions be endured? Three elements are observable – habitable instability, grieving to find hope and relating humanly to parts.

**Habitable instability.** There should be no surprise that attempting to be both truthful and kind in two contradictory directions leads to a both personal and interpersonal conflict. A variety of senses
of self can be experienced – sometimes calm and understanding, sometimes emotional and chaotic, sometimes seeking respite in practices that temporarily numb sensation. All therapists are used to sitting with those who struggle to project misfortune or dysfunction outside of themselves and in the process some external or internal splitting is inevitable.\textsuperscript{21} Coping mechanisms often work by keeping opposing senses of self apart. For example addiction is often experienced as the work of ‘others inside’\textsuperscript{22} eating disorders are about ‘not-me’ experience,\textsuperscript{23} and the harsher dissociation of trauma is - ‘not real, not true, not mine, not me.’\textsuperscript{24}

Sometimes the conflicting senses can solidify into a split between a ‘going-on-with-normal-life’ sense of self\textsuperscript{25} who can give the impression that no struggle is in progress and an ‘out of control’ sense of self that wildly ‘flails’\textsuperscript{26} about as if entrapped so that ‘our feelings are living us rather than we living our feelings.’\textsuperscript{27} Attempts to gain a sense of balance may fluctuate wildly and fits of despair arise that cannot be shaken off. The sense of being the person I was, having anything like the life that I envisioned, seems to evaporate. In such thrownness, survival may be the only priority, a struggle to merely get through the next 24 hours and be grateful, as an old colleague used to remark, ‘that the sun comes up in the morning.’ The best practical help that may be offered is the ability to ride out the experiential waves in a way analogous to ‘urge surfing’ for addiction.\textsuperscript{28}

In the face of this a second therapist challenge of \textit{Eigentlichkeit} may sound empathetic but unhelpful – it is to hold a client’s thrownness, sustaining disconnected, conflicting and sometimes destructive living. Confused and frightened people will look to a therapist to provide reassurance and ready answers, usually with a focus on symptom alleviation. The pressure to find solutions may be hard to resist. Yet the challenge is to hold an authentic therapeutic canvas (owned, kindly and true) that has space for the client’s thrownness - strongly conflicting senses of self, defensive and destructive behaviour, understanding and confusion. In Eliot’s terms this is to discern the problematic process as the making of ‘proper costumes’ rather than falling back into ‘new disguises.’

\textbf{Grieving, relief and hope.} At such times any therapist is tempted to accentuate the positive i.e. that which aligns with the client’s original self-concept or something that can be connected to it. This might be the beginning of optimism, the rebuilding of a consistent worldview, but it may be at the expense of the authenticity that the client seeks. By contrast the affirmation of the client in their vulnerable and contradictory experience potentially allows hope to arise – a sense of embodied authenticity and trust, not, like optimism, dependent upon particular results.\textsuperscript{29} The discovery of this quality can be a slow and tentative process, particularly for those burdened by guilt and shame that may have been too painful to approach and express. They are left with a diminished self that can be untouched by positive experience, a deep loss that waits to be grieved, not quickly, but through a slow sedimentary process that allows pain to be laid down.

Andy lost a chunk of his childhood and maybe a level of peace and security for most of his life. Clive spoke of having lost something unclear but precious, an anticipated road foreshortened. He felt he had walked out of the hospital into a different being-in-the-world. Betty coolly appraises the dropped threads in a relationship with someone who is ‘not wired like’ herself. By affirming the relationship she is potentially renouncing what matters to her most. Each client is faced with a huge loss – a pattern of existence in which much of their life and self-identity had been invested. They will need to come to terms with, own-up to, what will seem like a lesser, compromised self. As with any bereavement, the depth of loss needs to be worked through little by little - progress waiting till this has begun. As and when it is possible a client needs to come close again to the losses and feelings that arise, handle abandoned fragments and make something of themselves again. In
trauma terms, ‘the failure to grieve what was and what cannot be is a major non-realization that must be overcome in treatment.’

Having worked through grief and shame, an imperfect but authentic self (or selves) starts to be formed and becomes very precious. This may include a sense of merely having survived, of accepting dependence on coping mechanisms, of having given up on some ideas of self that had been important before. Luczaj puts release from an inauthentic self this way:

‘Once gaps in resistance, or rigid ‘characters’ are opened up, the structures are no longer needed and drop away. We are left not without features, not without characteristics, but without compulsions. There is such a sense of relief, at no longer having to hold up the whole edifice of being someone in particular, compelled to produce particular effects on the world, that joy naturally arises.’

Recently finishing therapy, a client wrote to me about her experience. She has several major psychiatric diagnoses, a history of trauma and substance abuse and was hospitalised several times for eating disorders. She had undergone many of the positive steps that are applauded in recovery from substance abuse and by society at large. Yet mercifully, and often without realising, I had been able to share some experience of her non-recovered self and demonstrate that she was not to be valued in any conditional way. This illustrates the significance of intrinsic hope compared with optimism calculated from particular contingencies. She wrote:

‘Going back into my past with you has helped me move forward and feel like I can cope with life. The main point I feel I should take away is that I’m not perfect. But that’s OK!’

A third therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit is therefore to be non-solution-focused – to facilitate sedimentary grieving so that an imperfect self or selves can be found and valued.

Listening to parts. This non-solution-focused approach provides space to explore the disjointed and the unresolved, maybe finding a place for an intolerable companion. Clive’s process was like a cat pawing a cushion in order to sit down. He dug around for ways to relate to his risky companion. So far the ‘stowaway’ handle word seem to fit his felt sense, a way of holding the reality in some tension. This process has some parallel with the treatment of dissociation where, ‘befriending our parts’ means ‘sharing our bodies and lives with ‘roommates’ … living amicably and collaboratively with all of our selves, not just the ones with whom we feel comfortable.’

As focusers we are perhaps particularly used to helping clients attend unclear ‘somethings’ and the incompatible needs of stuck ‘parts of me’. Sarah Luczaj points out this crucial move in focusing. The boundary with unwelcome reality comes down and the client is protected by a permeable boundary between self and felt sense:

‘The moment of ceasing to make a boundary, when ‘right action’ comes about, and we shift and move forwards, typically arises after the conscious making of a boundary between me and the felt sense, or ‘what it is in me that...’. Identifying a felt sense is a kind of disidentification and carrying forward is a further unhooking from the felt sense we were concentrating on a second ago. This is a process of dismantling ourselves as we previously thought we were (made up of a mass of contradictions, feelings, ‘inner objects’), leaving a more spacious sense of presence, which first ‘holds it all’ and then let’s go as it all changes (as everything will, if we do not strive to keep up the illusion of holding things still).’

This focusing-oriented approach is significantly different in theory and practice from the use of parts in other orientations. It avoids identification of parts with right or wrong cognitive structures, and
side-steps the tendency to over-emphasise or under-emphasise ownership e.g. psychoses, transference, configurations of self. Finding the boundary between self and intricate but shifting ‘somethings’ is invaluable when Eigentlichkeit demands the reconfiguration of a client’s reality. Most importantly it allows a degree of dis-identified connection – the ability to be humanly present with and for a felt sense, both ownedness and kindly truth. As Greg Madison comments: ‘In Focusing Oriented Existential Therapy, clients learn to bring their awareness to what was labelled “not-me,” or driven into oblivion because it was “negative” or “pessimistic” and made others feel uncomfortable.’ From a slightly different focusing tradition Barbara McGavin illustrates the disidentified, owned truthfulness when speaking to the part of her ‘that wants to die’:

“This is hard to say, because there is a part of me that would like you to feel differently, but I promise you that you can stay just the way you are for as long as you need. I will not pressure you to change, or feel differently or be different in any way. I will do my best to make a space where you can change, when and if you are ready in the way that you want to and hear what you need heard and support you in the ways that you need.”

So a fourth therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit is to explore felt senses and parts that may evoke fear and distress, allowing them to be held and let go.

**Theme 3 – An uncanny perspective**

So far my exploration of Eigentlichkeit has identified a willingness to face up to the uninvited guest and to negotiate the ambiguity and insecurity that comes from being true to it. The third theme takes such tasks one step further, recognising the particular carrying forward that arises from an encounter with mortality itself. To Heidegger being thrown-into life requires owning up to our own anxiety and also our lostness as a ‘being-toward death’. This is best explained by Stolorow:

“In authentic existing, we own up to death as our "uttermost" and "ownmost" possibility—"No one can take the Other’s dying away from him”—a possibility that is constitutive of our intelligibility to ourselves in our futurity and finitude, and that always impends as a constant threat. In the anxiety that discloses authentic existing, our absorption in the everyday world, which has been shielding us from our finitude, loses its significance, and we feel "uncanny" (Unheimlich)—no longer safely at home.”

The philosophical connotation of ‘uncanny’ is unusual these days, being more generally used to express the imprecise boundary between humanity and machines. However, being no longer ‘safely at home’ is all too common. Andy may have been unwittingly most accustomed to an underlying insecurity – living most of his life shadowed by a reality he could not recall. Apparently he had a reputation in adulthood as an instinctive defender of the weak and abused (whether they wanted it or not). In my conversation with Betty I was struck by the coolness of her appraisal, a momentary ability to look her own insecurity in the face and accept the consequences. Clive (like many of us) lives with mortality rather close at hand.

This aspect of Eigentlichkeit introduces a strange and significant enigma. Authenticity is about living through a valid engagement with the world and yet somehow it is dependent upon life-denying (or at least foreshortening) experience. It is as if the most real life is the most vulnerable. Here is an affirmation that also seems to run against the grain of modern therapeutic traditions - ones that look to treat vulnerability and eradicate the symptoms of anxiety or depression with pharmacology.

Yet what if we could accept the inherent fragility of our lives – that a cheery farewell ‘see you later!’ is less reliable than we like to think, and discover ourselves through an uncanny authenticity? In
this theme I will outline the particular authenticity of being handed-over, the ability to accept a radical embrace and the cool freedom of Exhilarating Pessimism.

**Handed-over.** I begin with Clive’s experience of the biopsy under general anaesthetic that revealed his tumour. In some ways this was just a standard procedure compared with more involved surgery - a patient turned up at the hospital, he was fully sedated for the exploration and later he went home. Just over an hour after walking through the hospital doors he described himself lying almost naked on a stretcher, ready to receive an anaesthetic from a stranger:

‘I had changed from being a conscious, confident person to being more just a body, a soon-to-be unconscious body - a prostate case. My entire human agency at that point consisted in lying still while they injected my arm. I was strangely very touched how the otherwise detached nurse by my side unaccountable squeezed my hand just as it happened.’

This points to an extreme moment of being ‘thrown-into’ life, embracing constraints to the point where much of normal living is ruled out. It reminded me of a Koine Greek term (Παραδίδωμι), often translated as ‘handed-over’, that is used in the Easter story in the gospel narratives. A theology book I had read in university explained how the use of this term marks the sharp transition between a strong able Jesus we see in his ministry and the shackled prisoner of his last days and hours. Jesus ceases to be the subject of action and becomes an object, someone/something acted upon, thereby losing some degree of being a full human being at all. Clive’s description has the feeling of this loss – a person becoming merely a piece of meat.39 My theology book emphasises the undervalued stature of ‘waiting’ in modern life, being acted upon:

‘Waiting can be the most intense and poignant of all human experiences - the experience which, above all others, strips us of affectation and self-deception and reveals to us the reality of our needs, our values and ourselves.’

I notice that the two qualities of authenticity we have been tracing are also available and important in Clive’s modern experience of being handed-over. Impotent in any physical sense, he has a choice about how to meet the moment. Stripped bare physically and existentially, he can still find reserves of truthfulness and ownedness, indeed perhaps they become more available then. Reuther puts it rather well:

‘Authenticity, viewed in this way, is an owning up to or taking hold of one’s life-in all its tragedy and joy, fragility and resilience-and, in spite of all this, still pressing forward. It entails a certain kind of acceptance for the uncertainty, unpredictability, and mystery of life alongside a willingness for the discovery of human life as a fluid and unrelenting process.’

**Accepting a radical embrace.** It feels that this particular felt sense may be implicitly present in many of our everyday moments and merely more visible in this extreme one. The theologian I quoted makes a point about the subject/object split and I am uncomfortable with this dichotomy, trying to myself avoid an inside/outside split or a body/mind split and hold onto Gendlin’s ‘original interaffecting.’42 As circumstance holds back someone’s capability to act, holding back the strength and dominance of the ego itself, the constant tendency to distinguish ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ can pause. Here is the initial pause I referred to in my first theme and also the sense of relief from the second theme, but with an added uncanny depth and relief. The pause that may allow us to stand aside from an egocentric perspective, and can in moments of discomforting challenge, offer us a more intimate connection with a situation than our normal boundary-making would allow. Sara Luczaj nicely explains this in a Buddhist interpretation of carrying forward:
'This is, I think, how we can appear to have 'moments' of no-self when a process is shifting and carrying forward. It is not that our self disappears, or that we discover a different layer of reality and then forget it, it is simply that we stop our activity of difference-making for a moment, only to resume it pretty quickly. As we are generally busy, from birth until death, constructing different boundaries between ourselves and others, thoughts and feelings, up and down, right and wrong, etc., it is little wonder that the 'felt shift' moment Gendlin describes, in which we sense a 'life-forward direction' without making any distinctions, is typically accompanied by a sigh, a release of tension, a sense of relief.\textsuperscript{43}

It seems that Clive notices a tangible authenticity in the moment, when the nurse squeezed his hand outside the operating theatre, a symbolisation of an interaffecting and the huge implicit trust he is placing in the strangers standing around him. Clive is handing himself over, embracing the moment by allowing himself to be-embraced by it. Here is no rash leap into the darkness, no wager of desperation. Notwithstanding the apparent fear there is a very person orientation here, one choosing ownedness, truth and personal connection. The concept of Radical Acceptance, with its roots in Zen, puts this rather well:

\begin{quote}
Thus, the experience of acceptance (related to seizing, taking, catching) is that of “getting it,” opening oneself to the context, striving to wait for understanding rather than leap in precipitously, acknowledging distress as an understandable outcome ... rather than as a problem to be solved.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

I want to suggest that however distinctively personal may be the step of authenticity, it is rooted in the interaffecting of the whole situation. It is for a person to catch on to the connected contingency of life all around, carefully and purposefully entrusting him or herself to it. A fifth therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit is therefore to notice a ‘no-self’ freedom to be embraced-by the whole situation life offers. Whilst less extreme, Betty’s choice seems to be made of the same stuff. She is opening herself up to the context that is most problematic for her, allowing herself to be embraced by it. This is not blind faith or calculating manipulation, but a human investment of kindness and truth. It may go wrong but, even if it did, this would not invalidate her authentic step.

**Exhilarating Pessimism and longing.** In a variety of ways I am struck by the coolness of Heidegger’s ‘being-toward death’. It is there in Andy’s attention to the perpetrator of his abuse, and there is a coolness in the way he handles himself – a rock climber holding himself against an unyielding surface, trusting one hand or foothold after another. There appear to be layers of Eigentlichkeit, different degrees of understanding, renunciation and acceptance that can be made. Somehow it feels as if some levels are only available to those who have faced the most unacceptable experience, such as a fatal illness, incurable pain or great loss. Maybe the capability to ‘get it’ can be found only from such a challenge.\textsuperscript{45} Greg Madison seems to capture this coolness in the idea of Exhilarating Pessimism – an approach which punctures the tendency towards a positive bias in culture and psychology. He suggests that we experience a homelessness in life,

\begin{quote}
‘not because we have been exiled from home, but rather because we have been exiled by home from the flow of self. The coziness of the tranquilized ‘substantial’ distances us from the self that calls us to be known as the elusive and ungraspable.’\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

If Eigentlichkeit robs us of the certainties of living, ushering in a presence which undermines a life we have carefully constructed, it also potentially offers moments of profound living, where it is enough to be authentically where one is. Madison makes a telling aside about his own experience:

\begin{quote}
‘Sometimes I feel my deep continuity with a universe that accepts me as I am but is indifferent to that
\end{quote}
fact that I am. Such experiences feel exhilarating, expansive, but not carrying forward.⁴⁷ In these terms any carrying forward must include ‘increasing expansiveness, as well as aging and death.’ An acceptance of imminent mortality may therefore become possible, providing a perception beyond the normal. The playwright Dennis Potter was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer in 1994 and gave a television interview where he touched on the predictability and insecurity of his position:

‘The only thing you know for sure is the present tense, and that nowness becomes so vivid that, almost in a perverse sort of way, I’m almost serene. You know, I can celebrate life. Below my window in Ross, when I’m working in Ross, for example, there at this season, the blossom is out in full now, there in the west early. It’s a plum tree, it looks like apple blossom but it’s white, and looking at it, instead of saying “Oh that’s nice blossom” … last week looking at it through the window when I’m writing, I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be, and I can see it. Things are both more trivial than they ever were, and more important than they ever were, and the difference between the trivial and the important doesn’t seem to matter. But the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous, and if people could see that, you know. There’s no way of telling you; you have to experience it, but the glory of it, if you like, the comfort of it, the reassurance … not that I’m interested in reassuring people - bugger that. The fact is, if you see the present tense, boy do you see it! And boy can you celebrate it.’⁴⁸

Madison robustly affirms the particular contribution of (existential) focusing-oriented therapy in working with challenging experiences of life. It has the capability to withstand the human demands for security and positive outcomes, so that:

‘we remain cut adrift without an omnipotent anchor, wagon or star, to manage the undercurrents of everyday life. The only "anchor" is the ever-shifting experiential process.’⁴⁹

He points to the sense of mortality and the changed perspectives that can arise from a focusing-oriented attention to it.⁵⁰ I notice a particular effect when reading the Potter excerpt above, recognising its context. It reminds me of my own minor brushes with mortality and also a particular kind of edge that can occur during therapy. At such moments an apparently secure and well-adjusted person will admit embarrassingly to ‘irrational’ insecurities, haunting fears, an unwelcome intrusion of the uncanny. Embarrassed, the client may apologise for troubling me with such ridiculous feelings. Yet they are a sign of an importunate awareness of the unfulfilled. For example there may be the uninvited, disturbing presence of longing, an unresolved need whose mere existence may challenge all that had seemed secure. O’Donohue puts it in these terms:

‘To be human is to belong. Belonging is a circle that embraces everything; if we reject it, we damage our nature. The word ‘belonging’ holds together the two fundamental aspects of life: being and longing, the Longing of our being and the Being of our longing. Belonging is deep; only in a superficial sense does it refer to our external attachment to people, places and things. It is the living and passionate presence of the soul.’⁵¹

Eigentlichkeit invites us to attend to insatiable longings that never will fit this time and place. It allows them recognition, honour and a way to relate to the struggle of living. Exhilarating pessimism presents a sixth therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit - to trust authentic experiencing and attend to the presence of nowness, mortality and insatiable longing.
Theme 4 – Unprotected encounter

The fourth and final theme picks up on preoccupations that have been constant in this discussion – What kind of relationship can one have with Eigentlichkeit? What relationship would support being with it? All the way through there has been an ambiguity about encountering the uninvited guest. The identity of this interloper has been kept carefully vague – Is it external reality, the ‘Other,’ denied drives, the ‘Bad Breast,’ a Jungian ‘Shadow,’ a visit from God? Who or what the uninvited guest may be, I have no doubt that there is a personal quality to the encounter. This sense of Eigentlichkeit is my final theme which will be explored through considerations of isolation/aloneness, the creative dance of belonging and not-belonging and the no self-presence of the therapist. At the end I will briefly recount a personal experience of meeting a stranger.

Aloneness. The first quality is associated with isolation and aloneness. You may recall that my Larkin poem speaks of a ‘unique distance from isolation.’ The individuals chosen to illustrate this concept are notably alone in their experience, dealing with burdens that cannot be shared. A useful perspective is provided by Winnicott who points out that the capacity to be comfortably alone is one of the most important signs of maturity in emotional development. For this skill to arise the child must learn how to be alone in the presence of someone else i.e. the protective environment of the mother. Without this security a person will be out of tune with themselves and reality, with it they will have the space to relax, and even tolerate floundering and disintegration.

Whilst apparently paradoxical, this Object Relations perspective seems to accord with the examples we have discussed – three people whose connections with the world have been shaken, who find themselves alone in a new way, yet need to be accompanied to embrace, not avoid their predicament. A therapist is there to help them be alone, but this presupposes the therapist is able to be alone with them. Countertransference reactions in trauma therapy illustrate how a therapist may instinctively run away from discomfort by ‘discounting’, mobilising primitive defences to ward off disintegration. Therapist failures in realization (being aware of reality as it is, accepting it, and then adapting to it effectively) will be a fundamental blockage to effectiveness. However empathetic, a therapist must learn to monitor and manage their own reactions, keeping themselves in a safe, regulated state that does not seek to erase or invade the distinctive aloneness the client must face.

Here Eigentlichkeit is a significant challenge for the therapist. Explicit owning and authenticity by the therapist may include a limitation on the therapeutic alliance – the client may well feel existentially alone in a way that may not be reachable by normal therapeutic means. An affirmation of aloneness, even a recognition of the experience of unbridgeable separation, is more important than a false connection. A seventh therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit is to recognise both client aloneness and therapist limitations, and own them authentically.

Home and away. A second quality arises from the normal therapeutic responses of empathy and acceptance. Stolorow puts it this way:

‘Existential anxiety anticipates both death and loss. Just as, in existing authentically, we are “always dying already,” so too are we always already grieving. The extent to which we can move toward more authentic existing depends significantly on whether the contexts of our living provide a relational home in which the emotional pain entailed in such a move can be held, borne, and integrated.’
This may explain something of the significance that emotional safety can be felt to play in the establishment of therapeutic work for those who have suffered such existential challenges. For example both clients and therapists at the charity for victims of sexual violence where I work show reliance on working in a particularly safe, warm and human space - a kind of relational home. The job of a therapist is to offer a space where a ‘learned secure attachment’ can be achieved to replace attachments that have been damaged.

Yet what kind of home would such clients appreciate? Betty is seeking a relationship that connects to her unfulfilled part, but is contemplating acceptance outside her comfort zone. Andy is digging around to incorporate even an old adversary into his world and Clive makes space for an unconvivial fellow traveller. They seek for a habitation that is more than just homely. Anna Magee’s study of experiences of belonging and not-belonging suggest they form a ‘Creative Dance’ and which:

‘together form a dynamic which is linked to individual and collective development. At the level of an individual, the reciprocal movement between experiencing Belonging and Not-belonging plays a central role in the processes of psychological individuation, the development of identity in terms of the self-reflexive awareness of an individual and a collective sense of ‘self, ... The movement between our longing for belonging and a sense of ‘wholeness’ - together with our desire to be recognised and ‘received’ as an individual - lies at the heart of the process of therapeutic healing and psychological and social re-integration after traumatic loss, separation or dissociation.’

The two strands juxtaposed in this study reflect the tension between ownedness and authenticity discussed above. They suggest that excursions from a secure base are at the heart of purposeful development but that an ‘existential migrant’ may need to step further in the quest for an ‘authentic home.’ Magee is very clear that neither the Belonging nor the Not-belonging poles are sufficient in themselves. The secret lies in the zig-zag between. An eighth therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit would therefore be to affirm a client’s migratory path – excursions to and from security in search of an authentic home.

No-self presence. One of the key issues for a therapist working with Eigentlichkeit is to focus on the existential heart of a problem, the felt sense, and not be distracted with the accompanying distress. As we have seen, when a fundamental challenge is felt, a normal defence is to attend to the particular discomfort, seeking a practical resolution. As counsellors we are used to this request. Andy might ask for help to find the perpetrator, Betty might look for reassurance in her relationship and Clive might discuss cures for prostate cancer. Each of these issues might be valid and important preoccupations for their parts, yet each of these individuals is struggling to relate to the whole – to stand back and re-contextualise themselves and their problem. How can all of this be related to? How can I come to terms with the whole?

The therapist’s approach towards a client is therefore crucial to sustain this orientation, when it is so easy to undermine it. Focusing therapy provides a core principle here, teaching us to find intuitively ‘the right distance’ - where one can feel ‘the whole thing’ However Gendlin also points to a more fundamental issue – the primacy of human presence in therapy. He speaks of ‘getting nothing in between,’ of putting aside one’s preoccupations and theories in an encounter with a client:

‘Then I am just here, with my eyes, and there is this other being. If they happen to look into my eyes, they will see that I am just a shaky being. I have to tolerate that. They may not look. But if they do, they will see that. They will see the slightly shy, slightly withdrawing, insecure existence that I am, I have learnt that that is O.K. I do not need to be emotionally secure and firmly present. I just need
to be present. There are no qualifications for the kind of person I must be. What is wanted for the big therapy process, the big development process is a person who will be present. And so I have gradually become convinced that even I can be that.63

This ‘shaky being’ quality suggests an unfettered personal openness and authenticity. The therapist is offering a matching vulnerability to the client, one that affirms their own thrownness and has a confidence in the transient flux of existence. Sarah Luczaj says:

‘As dis-identification with what we take to be ourselves in Buddhist practice leads to liberating insight, in therapy dis-identification with a problem may be empowering, in the sense that you are separate and bigger than the problem. Presence may be even more deeply empowering, in the sense that as you encompass and accept the problem, it changes, and finally with non-duality, there is nowhere for the ‘problem’ to hook on to, nowhere for it to be.’64

Experiences with the felt sense of Eigentlichkeit most vividly suggest to me the significance of the matching vulnerability between therapist and client. At minimum this is the need to relinquish particular status and avoid power where possible. I need to authentically step into the room with my immediacy of being, warts and all and own-up to my limitations and mistakes. Yet I am well aware that ‘fear of not being good enough,’ ‘pressure to find a solution’ and ‘look how clever I am’ can easily lead me astray. I hope that the ‘shaky’ qualities of ownedness, truth and kindness will be available to clients through me. A ninth therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit is to hold their own thrownness and as a ‘shaky being’, be present with the whole of the client.

As a footnote I will describe a particular experience that points me to a affirm a shaky therapeutic identity.

Meeting a stranger. A year ago I found myself conducting an experiment with a colleague during a break in a residential counselling course. We had talked over some serious matters that had come up in the training and he suggested that we might do some ‘two chair’ work (using the model from Gestalt and Emotion Focused Therapy).65 However there was to be a significant difference. He proposed not the usual process of swapping between chairs but that, accompanied, I conduct a two chair process with myself using a mirror. As I was well practiced in sitting opposite someone and offering empathy, he suggested that I should try offering the same to myself! My colleague would be behind me, where I could see his reflection – he would offer a significant presence but did not speak.

The experience of facing myself in this way was challenging at first, almost impossible. I looked at the chap in the glass but wasn’t sure I knew him, wasn’t sure I liked what I saw. He demanded a good deal of empathy from me. As I looked into his eyes I felt drawn in, as if I was looking through them into infinity. We sat in uncomfortable silence for some time. Eventually I realised that I needed to speak to him and gradually a simple dialogue began. This was certainly an uncanny encounter with a rather shaky being, a mixture of kindness and awe. Whilst the meeting was by invitation there was more than a little sense of the ‘uninvited guest’ about it. I was pleased to be there with him as much as I could.
Since then I have more often noticed similar moments with supervisees and clients where a distinctive pause (Abstand) arises. It as if, looking into their eyes there is a particular mutuality, an almost awesome connection – what Betty described as somewhere between ‘best-me’ and ‘me-out-of-the-way,’ a ‘softening – both vulnerability and presence.’ It suggests to me a tenth therapist challenge of Eigentlichkeit which is to pause and be met oneself, softly – both vulnerability and presence.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I have set out a personal interpretation of Eigentlichkeit, a concept from Heidegger. Having drawn on some appropriate scholarship I have considered it using the metaphors from a play and a poem and then sought to cross the result with my experience with three individuals. I have particularly related the results to psychotherapy and have set out ten challenges for a therapist as a result:

1. To recognise a client’s authentic pause – a brave if unclear intention.
2. To hold a client’s thrownness, sustaining disconnected, conflicting and sometimes destructive living.
3. To facilitate sedimentary grieving so that an imperfect self or selves can be found and valued.
4. To explore felt senses and parts that may evoke fear and distress, allowing them to be held and let go.
5. To notice a ‘no-self’ freedom to be-embraced-by the whole situation life offers.
6. To trust authentic experiencing and attend to the presence of nowness, mortality and insatiable longing.
7. To recognise both client aloneness and therapist limitations, and own them authentically.
8. To affirm a client’s migratory path – excursions to and from security in search of an authentic home.
9. To hold their own thrownness and as a ‘shaky being’, be present with the whole of the client.
10. To pause and be met oneself, softly – both vulnerability and presence.

This concept opens up a challenging understanding of therapy for me, linking richly with Focusing, Buddhism and Existential Philosophy. I hope the conference presentation of this paper and subsequent reading of it will be stimulating to fellow therapists and others. I particularly hope that, in a focusing sense, this discussion may cross richly with other experience. I warmly encourage anyone to contact me with feedback or comments as seems appropriate. I am particularly interested to hear where crossings indicate contradictions and contrasts with my experience or where steps in different directions have arisen.

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References


4. Leowald says human beings are ‘born without informed consent’ and Togashi links this to trauma as an experience of ‘being thrown into the world without informed consent.’ See:


10. (Gendlin, 1978/79) my emphasis.

11. All names have been changed.

12. ‘PEAR’ (Problem, Escape, Analyse, Resolve)


(Eliot, 1971:146)


The distinction between the contingency of optimism and the entirely different seat of hope is well made by the philosopher John Gray in many places.

(Steele et al, 2017:483)


(Fisher, 2017:101) which quotes the following poem:

‘I am not I. I am this one
walking beside me whom I do not see,
whom at times I manage to visit,
and whom at other times I forget;
who remains calm and silent while I talk,
and forgives, gently, when I hate,
who walks where I am not,
who will remain standing when I die.’


(Luczaj, 2015:168) my emphasis.


‘When a person says to a friend, “I’ll see you later” or a parent says to a child at bedtime, “I’ll see you in the morning,” these are statements, like delusions, whose validity is not open for discussion. Such absolutisms are the basis for a kind of naive realism and optimism that allow for one to function in the world, experienced as stable and predictable. It is in the essence of emotion trauma that it shatters these absolutisms, a catastrophic loss of innocence that permanently alters one’s sense of being-in-the-world. Massive deconstruction of these absolutisms of everyday life exposes the inescapable contingency of existence on a universe that is random and unpredictable and in which no safety of continuity of being can be assured.’

(Eliot, 1971:30)

‘There’s a loss of personality;
Or rather, you’ve lost touch with the person
You thought you were. You no longer feel quite human.
You’re suddenly reduced to the status of an object —
A living object, but no longer a person.
It’s always happening, because one is an object
As well as a person. But we forget about it
As quickly as we can. When you’ve dressed for a party
And are going downstairs, with everything about you
Arranged to support you in the role you have chosen,
Then sometimes, when you come to the bottom step
There is one step more than your feet expected
And you come down with a jolt. Just for a moment
You have the experience of being an Object
At the mercy of a malevolent staircase.
Or, take a surgical operation.
In consultation With the doctor and the surgeon,
In going to bed in the nursing home,
In talking to the matron, you are still the subject,
The centre of reality. But, stretched on the table,
You are a piece of furniture in a repair shop.’


(Reuther, 2017:542)


(Luczaj, 2015:168) my emphasis.

This resonates with the cool, stony tranquility I was able to discover when visiting a particular Japanese Zen garden and a poem that we were given at that time:

A flower blooms silently,
Falls silently
And never returns to its branch.
It devotes its entire life
In the time and in the place.
The voice of a flower
The truth of a flower
The joy of eternal life shines
There with no regret.

Shibayama Zenkei, Chief abbot of Nanzen-Ji Temple, Kyoto.


Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Rev 3:20)


(Steele et al, 2017:22)


(Stolorow, 2011) original emphasis.


(Magee, 2014:187-8)


psychotherapy, and change (pp. 255-279). New York: Guilford. (page 269 footnote)


\[ \text{(Luczaj, 2015:171-2).} \]