

This book is the second novel, by Peter Stickland, a writer from the UK, and Marc Melchert, a psychotherapist from Switzerland. Once again, they offer us a window into the stories and dreams that arise out of the therapy sessions of their characters, Alex and Stefan.

You are invited to share in the private reflections of these two men, getting close to their reveries, both conscious and unconscious, and learning about how they wrestle with the complex themes that arise during therapy.

They discover shared aspirations and conflicting philosophies. They invent provocative and precarious strategies to hide vulnerability. They distract each other from discovering hidden anxieties. Despite these tricks, it is their search for the truth, their generous friendship and their analytical insights that help them find some kind of path through the complexities that face them.

A Gradual Disappearance

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77books

First published in the UK May 2019

77books

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For Thomas and Monica;
their skill in friendship is an inspiration.

And A Gradual
Re-appearance

ALEX

Damn. I'm in trouble again. I thought everything had calmed down. I should be allowed to live my life as I want to. There's always something I should do or something I'm not doing right. I should have the right to some peace, but Millie says she doesn't want me turning into a recluse. It seems that I don't engage enough with her or anyone else. Strikes me that whenever I open my mouth, in public or in private, people yawn or look as if they can't wait for me to finish speaking. No one contacts me anymore and I don't contact anyone, unless there's a reason. I'm happy with this. I don't have to listen to what others think is important for me to hear.

This little argument is not going to go away. Millie will stay on my case until I talk with an analyst or a therapist. She thinks I can learn how to change my behaviour to suit her. Why is silence a problem? I hate the competitiveness that takes such a precedent everywhere. Why do so many people want to dominate conversations when they only bore their listeners? It takes children a long time to make a full appearance, so why shouldn't old people take some time to make a gradual disappearance?

I suppose I could always see Stefan. He wasn't entirely useful and his theories drove me mad, but I liked him well enough. Actually, we got on rather well when we met outside the consulting room. (Something I had instigated and which was definitely not in the rule book.) The

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problem about therapy is that I only ever feel like lying. I'm not a good candidate for this kind of thing.

Today, I searched Stefan at the Psychoanalytic Centre. He is still working there. I felt relief, but I still can't decide whether to contact him.

Last night I had a dream of Stefan. Maybe he's a safer pair of hands than some eager young analyst. It would smooth Millie's fears, though I doubt it will stop me disappearing.

Recently, I've been having repetitive dreams. In one, my feet are being eaten by fish and in the other I am failing to deliver a coherent lecture. In the lecture, I am drawing a diagram about ambiguity – some kind of structure – but it looks like a cubist collage. My lecture is contradictory and the students look confused. This is odd because I am exceptionally devoted to both cubism and ambiguity. Obviously, this hasn't helped me make a coherent presentation about their qualities to my students.

When Stefan appeared, he and I were together in a hilly landscape, something like Switzerland. He was talking enthusiastically about hating concepts. This morning, I felt better than I have done for some time. I think this is rather sympathetic. I've always hated the word concept, so I fully supported his dislike of the word.

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Today I wrote to Stefan. I didn't really explain my situation, I gave him vague hints and asked if he would take me on. His role in my dream showed him in a good light, so I mentioned his beneficial presence. I imagine flattery works with these people as well as it does with anyone.

Nothing is ever simple. Last night I had another dream of Stefan and he was insisting that even the concept of 'no concepts' is a concept. I felt deflated. I hated having a sense of his maddening double-bind theories again. I am now in a state of shock. It's too weird for me to be dealing with.

I've been trying to recall anything else that might be important about this dream. I think Stefan told me a zen story – he was always doing this. I get the sense that I was trying to explain the kind of sensitivity that shamans have, but he wore that disinterested look that I know so well from other's I speak to. Now I can't bear the thought of seeing him. I don't want to hear about 'no concepts' being a concept. I don't want any more therapy and I don't want to be in a position where I must lie.

Why should I lie to please my partner and my analyst? It's crazy. There's nothing I can do. I just have to sit tight for a while and wait for his response.

STEFAN

Last week I received a request from a former client who wants to take up therapy with me again. His name is Alex. He always had something intriguing to say. In his request letter he told me about a dream in which I had a beneficial effect. What he revealed was a little spooky, because in his dream I was talking about hating concepts and I'd had an experience recently about exactly the same subject.

I was at a psychiatric clinic, having a discussion with the head of the clinic and a zen master. We were discussing the contribution meditation can make when it is used in psychotherapy. I suggested that it might help our clients come to terms with ambiguity. The zen master looked at me and shook his head. He told me that ambiguity is a concept and I should leave concepts behind in preference to embracing the activity of the moment. His words were patronising and annoying. I told him that many people are afraid of ambiguity. We didn't leave on the best of terms. To my mind, the 'no-concept' argument is also a concept, and it's a particularly nasty one!

I'm not sure Alex would agree with me.

I've thought about Alex over last few days. I should have discussed him with Kathy, but I didn't; she would definitely have advised against me seeing him - though she too has a soft spot for his surprising antics. I want to hear

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more about his dreams, but I also want to be far from him. He can fill me with dread and yet I want to listen to his intriguing thoughts. A charming man who ran me a merry dance round every possible therapeutic issue imaginable. He was as slippery as an eel to get hold of. Still deciding what to do.

Without knowing what is best, I wrote to Alex agreeing to see him. For some assurance I enclosed all the conditions that he must accept before our sessions begin, but I know this will mean nothing in scheme of things.

It gets weirder. At the weekend, I was at a party in a house almost identical to the one where Alex and I first met. Many years ago, I was standing in a garden with many other guests, when Alex appeared and started entertaining us with a performance. Remembering this event was delightful, but the blatant synchronicity of this event has sent a little shiver through me. This kind of chance occurrence happens to me more often as I get older. Maybe I am simply more aware of it these days, but this is an extraordinary example of synchronous activity and it doesn't stop here.

Today I read through the letter Alex sent. He claimed that in his dream lecture he was trying to express the qualities of ambiguity, which is the term I used when talking to the monk. What is odd, is that I have hardly ever used this word in my life. Strange synchronous events

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aside, it is certain that the monk was wrong. Every thought we have is a concept, so of course ambiguity is a concept. With concepts, the important thing to remember is that we must not try to avoid them and we must not try to cling on to them. This is the way of Zen.

I don't know where this leaves me. I have mixed feelings for sure. We all have mixed feelings, this is our reality, but generally I am assisting my clients to cope with their mixed-up feelings, not dealing with my own. A therapist must try to detect mixed up feelings and name them. The ambiguity my client's experience is not a concept, it is brutal reality. Having said this, ambiguity is also precious, abundant, plentiful and beautiful. When we need help, we must ask questions and the kind of questions we ask determines the kind of answers we get.

A man went to a rabbi with this question:

“I am longing for eternal life, what can I do?”

“Get married!” the rabbi answered.

“Really, will I then have eternal life?” The man asked.

“No, but your longing will disappear.”

We must try to find the best possible questions.

ALEX

Stefan has agreed to see me. I told Millie - looking for congratulations - but she remembers that I talked about Stefan when we first met. She is already suspicious that I have fabricated a deceit. I said she could talk to Stefan to verify his professional attitude and claimed that I had over exaggerated the games I played with him. She is not convinced.

We must care for our planet and the poorest people in it; everything else is secondary. Whether I talk or not is not an issue, compared to the extinction of the planet. Why must I attempt to communicate my feelings? My new book is far more important to me. I'd like some conversation about this. I don't talk because I can't find anyone who is interested in my conversation.

My new book is *The Tao of Naming Place*. Naming things is important; it's a life-giving activity. If we are ever going to be in a position when we feel deeply connected to our planet then we must know how to give poetic names to the things in our world as well as lower the carbon footprint.

Being from somewhere is much better than being from nowhere. Naming the landscape and creating a sense of

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place is what our ancestors did. They forged a sympathetic relationship with their land and named it because living in an unknown environment was too fearful for them. This naming activity is connected to storytelling. Through the stories that are contained by the places, people gained a shared identity and developed a profound sense of self. They had a communal body of 'local knowledge' which they mapped, named and shared in stories that established notions of wisdom, morality and benevolence. By speaking of their places, the ancients learned how to deal with the present and interpret the past.

Through all the discussions I have had with Stefan, not once did we touch upon inhabiting the world like this. It is better that we talk of these things rather than some vague relationship concerns. They are so boring and they never seem to change. In social situations, I am always the one to surrender; the needs of others dictate how things proceed.

My feelings about relationships were the subject of the diagram I was trying to draw in my dream lecture. Was it an attempt to visualise a solution to a power struggle? There is always someone who holds the upper hand. I was trying to draw a diagram of a relationship that was cubist in form, a dynamic that is broken into parts and rearranged to give a different kind of picture; an ambiguous one. It didn't work out in my dream.

Must I now learn how to behave according to the rules my partner and therapist dictate? I don't need to learn this. I could easily stop whatever it is I am doing wrong if I

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wanted to, but I don't. Stefan will probably argue that I do need to learn it because I reject it and I want to hide for neurotic reasons. Bah!

What can I do about my need to hide? I have only known hiding. It is based on the premise that I don't have to live by the same rules as everyone else. My hiding is a life-long ambiguous habit that has many fine qualities. I should be able to go about the task of naming my place in all this, but I suspect that it simply isn't that kind of territory.

Found this poem today. *The Cloths of Heaven* by William Butler Yates. It has been a long time since I last read it.

The Cloths of Heaven

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

He is writing to the love of his life and trying to create a poetic reality to frame his feelings. It might not be the best way for him to live his life, but it is his truth and he

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doesn't need to go to a therapist to discuss why he wants to live in such an abstract reality. In a way he too is hiding. I also read this. A Spanish poet; Carlos Almeida. Never read him before, but it has the same form as Yates' poem.

Revels from reverie

We discovered marvels on playful nights,
Staged surrender and found fresh senses,
But you got cold feet and turned out the lights,
Made rules to bind, built intensive fences.
You hid the wonder and ceased being free,
So I drifted off to flow with streams,
Inventing revels from reverie;
A life of whimsy, lived only in dreams.

Carlos is also hiding. How else could he engage in *a life of whimsy, lived only in dreams*? He can only give us a hint of his reality, a reflection of how he hides in reverie. The hint is the important thing. It is not possible to approach these things directly or fill them with detail.

I discussed much of this in my first session, but it didn't go anywhere. This is already frustrating.

STEFAN

First meeting with Alex. He doesn't want to talk. Discussion reminded me of Suzuki talking with one of his students.

Student: I don't feel that talking about Buddhism or the *Sando-kai* is the same as my life or my practice. I feel some separation. Talking about it is something else.

Suzuki Roshi: I felt that way myself for a long time. It is rather difficult to communicate some feeling through my talk. That is why the old masters twisted a student's nose or hit them. Right here! They'd ask the student; What are you thinking about? In short, that is the point. I am going around and around the point, so I am using words. We speak of scratching an itchy foot with our shoe on. It doesn't help so much, but even so I have to talk.

I feel I should address Alex's need to hide, but I am wondering if this subject is too dense to tackle at the beginning of our sessions. In any event, I cannot respond off the top of my head. I need to sink into my thinking as I write this to see if something brief, but relevant, arises. Is there anything I can say about avoiding reality?

I like what Alex said about the naming of places and the consequences of it. Is this about him wanting to feel

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connected to the community, wanting to provide others with the feelings of connectedness?

He told me he doesn't have to live by the same rules as everyone else. This is the nature of his public persona and his private persona and they do not seem to have a direct relationship with each other. He doesn't seem to have a close relationship with his partner. Is that why he is hiding? This is an observation not a criticism. I suppose I am just trying to name the ambiguities.

For me the notion of relationship has to do with 'quality.' It is an important issue. Here's what Robert M. Pirsig said about it in, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Quality cannot be related to either a subject or an object, it can only be the relationship between the two. We might use the word quality to talk about value and we might use it to talk about the attributes of a thing; that is, describing what qualities a thing has. So, if I am interested in a relationship between two people, I am interested in the value and attributes of their activities over time. Quality is an event, it is relatedness that occurs in a timeline.

What happens between two humans is a specific event which has a unique nature. Being aware of this helps the therapist consider and discuss the problems in a relationship without falling into the omnipresent traps and pitfalls. I can't figure out who is guilty, I can only try to determine what happened. Running in circles around the question of guilt is endless and unhelpful, but looking at the relationship as an event, something which happens in

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a timeline, will give me a new way of looking at the situation. I need to help Alex find a way out of the swamp.

Alex always gives the impression that he is confident and has the power to direct his life as he wishes. I suspect this is only true for certain situations. At home he appears to be directed. Does he allow this? Was there something in his early life that took his power away? Something that demanded his acceptance. Silence is often a result of being overpowered and those who are overpowered generally find it difficult to ask for help. I have much to do.

I asked Alex why he felt such an urge to write. He said, he was completing a process; turning a series of feelings into an object. What does he mean by this? Given what I feel about object, subject and quality, is it possible that Alex is talking about an event in time; trying to find quality?

ALEX

I'm grumpy. I'm grumpy about me and I am grumpy about Stefan. These new Zen people, so anxious to know things. I preferred it when Stefan didn't have a clue about what he or his profession was up to. I think it is better for us all to live this way. More honest. I don't have a clue. I just write a poem because I don't have a clue. I make objects that are ambiguous because I don't have a clue. The reason I hide is I don't want to be asked what I'm doing. I don't want to be with people who want to teach me how to behave or how I should think. I know deep down what I mean, but I can't find the words for it. That's why I have to make objects using my intuition. Like an artist does. In this way I bring my world a little, just a very little, into the daylight.

An artist's objects reveal something for a short while and then they melt back into whatever condition they came from. The artist must start again, back at the place where they know nothing, and wait until something else comes to them out of the blue. When it does, they have to be quick. Such things move like bullets. They have to pluck them out of the air before they pass by. What artists are not good at is analysing feelings or having concepts about them. They must convert feelings into objects - a painting or a poem. They have no other skills.

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Stefan thought my interest in ‘naming place’ was about me wanting to create togetherness or *communitas*. It’s not. I just feel close to the sensitivity that the ancient people had when poeticising their hostile landscapes so beautifully. The world spoke to them and they spoke to the world - the mountains, the rivers, the rocks and the trees. They had a material imagination, not a conceptual one.

Writing songs is good for me. I have a quick glimpse of something and then move quickly to make it an object before the feelings of connectedness disappears. I can’t start with subjects; they are too specific. I don’t know what Stefan means about quality. I just convert ambiguity into a slightly more structured setting, giving it form, but not destroying its ambiguity. I love ambiguity. It is bigger and more truthful than pretending to know.

Artists convert feelings into film, painting or sculpture etc. They’re all involved with editing, changing the original, in order to improve the quality and value of the object, but they are not making quality a theory. Stefan has quality as a theory to help him locate truths. There are no truths or the chance of a better life, only the satisfaction gained from converting something vague into a beautiful object. In my little world, editing is everything. There is only editing. This feels like a very delicate position. I know very little about anything and I hardly touch the world. For certain, I am too sensitive. I will return to my little cave now.

CHAPTER THREE

Today's song.

I sang for the trees

Well I sang for the trees in the hope that I'd find
Some sonorous notes, that most always prove kind
A song for beginnings, a hopeful new start
A song for connection to lighten my heart

Well my voice it was tender, a slightly cracked sound
A whisper on silence was all that I found
But I knew its potential and sang for those trees
And the listening branches they moved in the breeze

Then I sensed that the forest would like to join in
But the purr in my song it made hardly a din
I hummed though in wonderment, full of surprise
'Cos the knots in the tree trunks had tears in their eyes

So I lifted the tempo and watched as they moved
Their branches were waving to my gentle groove
I sang about wonder and what I found true
And the trees breathed the rhythms right out of the blue

Yes, they moved with each note and wrinkled their bark
As my voice rang out just as sweet as a lark
The leaves they applauded and liberally waved
And with flickering grace I knew I was saved

STEFAN

Today Alex was fighting me. Fighting isn't the problem; it's silently suffering that's the problem. I suspect Alex is silently suffering. He thinks he and I live on different planets, but we are not as different as he think or wishes. He puts his feelings into some form of artistic activity and I put my feelings into some form of analytic activity. Both are different methods of dealing with emotional tension. Which one is better or more useful depends on who you are, what resources you have at your disposal, what stories you tell yourself, what concepts you tend to develop and what strategies you create to get by.

I am an Analyst. My preferred method for dealing with life is to try to analyse and interpret human relationships. Potentially, there are many beautiful stories to be found in this method and they frequently work unconsciously and sensitively. Not everything has to be analysed. We can work with ambiguity and hints, but to be clear we must, to conclude the process, try to express things in concepts. Imagine if you were an architect and all you produced were vague sketches. What would be built?

When I start to analyse, the event and the people involved become accessible. It is as if I can touch them, take them in my hands, turn them round and look at them from every angle – it's like an object we can slice up to observe all its dimensions and layers. This object gives me structure and a place to shelter. There is often a storm of

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bewildering feelings raining down on me. If I lose the opportunity to analyse, to structure and to conceptualise, I am lost. I must learn how to arrange the complex set of parts I have before me. It seems to me that have a great many emotional tensions to handle.

I have been thinking about these two questions. Why am I always analysing? Why do I want to discipline ambiguity? The first answer is easy. Analysing is better than suffering. The second answer is, I want to help release the tensions that too much ambiguity creates. Ambiguity is an ambition for Alex. He thinks there is too much reliance on rational decision making. He is looking for a balance. He wants to show the world that intuition also has a place.

There are times when I feel I would love to put my emotions into an art form. It is easy to envy the skills of an artist who can inspire others with their paint or written works. Making real things, offering all ones tensions to an object, is a wonderful and ancient practice. Dancing and singing was always important because it moved tensions into collective sounds and movements. Analysing moves tensions into the mind and that is dangerous because it can fade away and be forgotten. By writing my thoughts, the thoughts last longer and I can re-visit them.

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Fighting and analysing aren't the problem; it's silently suffering afterwards that's the problem. The real challenge is to overcome the fantasy that you don't have to fight - keeping the tension as it is and accepting the condition of not being able to live with a consensus.

No matter what we do, whether we create art, name places, analyse situations, decode and find structures for complex situations, they are all ways of dealing with life. Anything has to be better than suffering in silence. Editing, improving the quality of a thing, is better than suffering and that, for the most part, is carried out in silence. Silence itself isn't the problem, the important thing is to connect with the tension, encounter the ambiguity and find ways to change it. Sometimes change is a matter of changing the rhythm, one can't always make big structural changes.

This is what I mean by quality. Writing about it is hard for me. It makes me melancholy. I would like to have the skills of an artist, but I don't have them. I can talk, but even with writing, I struggle. Somehow, I can't see how to give shape to things. Maybe the stories I create out of my work are something objective. I have stopped writing in recent years. I remain focussed on the content, not on the object. I want the issue and resolution to please me, not the story itself. Actually I want both.

ALEX

Stefan asked if he is making me grumpy. Only I can make myself grumpy. I don't do it consciously, it's just my cantankerous old self, rising up in me. What Stefan does is make me feel frustrated – sometimes this feeling turns into self-reflection. This is a service Stefan hopes he's providing almost as naturally as he breathes air. It's not that easy.

I hate the thought that we must go on and on repeating the same old stuff knowing that it is never going to change anything. It will never lead anywhere. I want something to surprise me. What I do not want is therapy talk. The whole fiasco a pointless and threatening experience.

My view changes. I am suffering a little, but its bearable, so I don't want to talk about it. Others may be suffering a great deal; misery in silence. I'm not close enough to these people to have anything to contribute to their position. I'm grateful that I'm free of real turmoil. Had circumstances been different, I could have been there. I could have been living on the street with nothing. I have to admit I've been lucky. We should help those who are truly suffering on this planet, not talking about the oddities of my particular way of engaging or not with social discourse.

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Is Stefan envious of artists. Many people think artists have a lucky ticket to somewhere. Many talk about art as if it's a corporate thing. Very few take responsibility for liking an artist because they appreciate the specific invitation that artist makes to them. These people never find out that an artist can put them in touch with something real. It's a special event not a sentimental journey. We have to choose. How could we possibly like as much art as the media assumes? We have to work hard to find an artist we like and trust. The artists I like generally start from nowhere, with nothing, and after watching and listening for a while they begin to play. I find this truthful. The activity is not comparable to the work a therapist does. They have a big heart. They are prepared to listen to people struggling to stay alive. This is the workings of a generous spirit and there is little anyone can do to glamorise it.

I have been thinking more about silence. Silence without suffering is a blessing. One can make connections without words. I write something only if I feel it to be true. Often, I only know something's true after I have written it. I care deeply about truth, but I can only play with it in an ambiguous way. If I was silently suffering, Stefan would want to take this ambiguity, find its parts and its structure and offer me a series of concepts or strategies for owning it. He survives by making admissions, naming, clarifying and conceptualising. I probably survive by denying, avoiding, obfuscating and giving the primary role to ambiguity. We are very different...and yet...I practice my

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way because I think it's a quality that is lacking in our world. I advocate that chaos should be allowed into the process. He practices his way, because his clients get lost in complexity and need help to unravel it. He advocates less chaos in the process. I want to find rich complexities.

I have been thinking about a phrase that Stefan used; shared attention. I have no idea what he was talking about. You don't get shared attention in the art world – it's every ego for itself. It can be a bloody place. We fantasise that therapists are strong, confident people who rigorously and selflessly attend to the concerns of others. I watched a film yesterday about a small group of Buddhist nuns in Tibet. They left their tiny, dishevelled monastery to live for three years in a small house high up in the mountains. Their ambition...to meditate and send out peace to the world. They had never seen a billionth of the world and yet they knew it needed saving. The most remarkable thing was their happiness. I have hardly ever seen such genuine happiness and not the slightest scent of a concept anywhere to be found.

Sometimes I can't stop writing, but I like getting lost, seeing where it leads. A one-hour therapy session is too short to get anywhere. It's a punishment.

STEFAN

Alex has a prickly personality. I've known many like this. I was once at the funeral of a client, called Rosa, who had a prickly personality. Rosa died after a long period of illness. She'd been a producer for television documentaries and movies. She had lived alone. She never behaved well at social occasions, always challenging what was said, so she made very few friends. Her sister and her sister's husband decided to take care of the funeral. They were shocked to learn that Rosa's acquaintances did not want to attend. Even Rosa's other sisters showed great reluctance. Only her former colleagues replied quickly and positively.

After the funeral, the guests gathered in a restaurant. Everyone felt uncomfortable until a director addressed the assembled mourners. He talked of working with Rosa and claimed she was one of the most competent and resourceful producers he had ever worked with. He then added that any kind of relationship with her was almost impossible. He related a few anecdotes, describing what she had made possible and how difficult she was to deal with and people were visibly relieved. After his speech, the director received hearty applause and the guests became relaxed and started talking in a lively manner.

Tensions are relieved when the troubling thing is named and spoken about. This shows what happens when ambiguity becomes conscious.

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I related this story to friends and colleagues and asked them how they would describe the story. One said it was a typical example of how scared middle-class Europeans are; how they're too frightened to speak even among their own kind. Another said it showed how limited our view of acceptable behaviour is and a third said it was a sad example of how intolerant we are to people who behave in a slightly different way. Most of the others I asked were outraged at Rosa's sisters and her acquaintances for showing a complete lack of insight and sensitivity.

The most interesting response I received was from a client who said that the director was the only one who was prepared to accept Rosa's difficult personality. For sure he had to get a job done and Rosa could do this admirably, but he had no reason to complain; her lack of relationship skills didn't do him any harm. Maybe this gave him a better overall picture of the situation, but it could be that he was just a stronger, more courageous person than the rest of us. We rarely celebrate a person because they have more insight than we do. No one hearing this story blamed Rosa for the reactions she elicited and no one suggested she should have had a therapist who could have helped her bring ambiguity into consciousness.

I think about Alex before our next session. I don't agree with him. We are not so different. Art and therapy are more closely aligned than he thinks. Artists work primarily for themselves and it could be argued that Therapists do the

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same. They don't actually work for their clients. Their work is a way of expressing their experience. When a person enters into a relationship with an art object or with therapeutic talk, they learn something from the words or images that are triggered during the interaction. Artists and therapists engage with their activities for their own benefit, not for the benefit of their audience.

That's what I mean by "The conflict is not the problem; the emptiness afterward is." Struggling with objects or setting up therapy sessions are both ways of eluding our feelings of emptiness. We do everything out of an inner motivation to side-step our fear of feeling that we have no value or purpose. By explaining what we do, we are only justifying ourselves, creating a convenient concept, but what we are actually doing is avoiding insecurity. We are talking about ambiguity because the source of our insecurity is life and life is that frustrating and ambiguous thing we must go through.

The Tao says: "Wei Wu Wei," do or do not. So, we can act or not act, but if we are going to act, then we must accept that motivation comes from our insides; we must not attempt to legitimise it with a concept.

ALEX

Why on earth would Stefan use the term “Wei Wu Wei”? He said it was a statement about whether we should act or not act. I guess he was implying that I was not acting. I just looked up the words and, in my book, wu-wei, means “no action contrary to nature.” Wu means not have or without; Wei means do, act, serve as, govern or effort. The literal meaning of wu-wei is “without action,” “without effort,” or “without control.” Wei wu wei is a paradox. It means “action without action” or “effortless doing.” According to Taoists, one cannot actively pursue wu wei. It establishes itself as a result of cultivation. Taoist philosophy is only a guide, it simply attempts to show how one may act without struggling or using excessive effort. I think artists often work by effortless action and I guess therapists would concur that too much effort can be self-defeating.

Stefan and I definitely use ‘ambiguity’ for totally different purposes. I am sure he wants to put artists and therapists in the same bag, but this is hardly credible. It is even hard to find two artists who fit in the same bag. With similarity we look for difference and with difference we look for similarity.

CHAPTER FIVE

My little world is peculiar. I like art to demonstrate both a structural and an ambiguous side and I like both qualities to display their dynamic relationship. Bringing ambiguity into consciousness has nothing to do with my art. If a person is unlucky enough to feel disturbances that they can't cope with, then they might have to get to know the complexities of their ambiguity, but if one isn't disturbed, I think it is best not to interrogate our ambiguity. We should learn to play with it and get good at it.

Ambiguity is a happy word. It suggests an unclear situation. It is a state where more than one meaning can be given to anything and only a divergent interpretation can do it justice. I am fascinated by the relationship between structure and ambiguity. I like them both to be known. In the 70's *Structuralism* was an art movement. Artists wanted their work to connect with an overarching system or structure. They wanted art to have a broad base and thereby uncover the structures that underlie things, like how we think, how we perceive, how we feel etc.

I'm a speed freak. I play with structure quickly. I have a highly tuned ability to synthesize complex conditions quickly. Before I look too hard at the territory, I make simple direct structures that assist me to find new avenues. I don't mind if I am wrong or if it is full of contradictions. I don't want to inherit precise formulas, I want to practice an intuitive, ambiguous approach to work.

I have just found my copy of William Empson's book, 'Seven types of ambiguity.' Literary critics in the 1930's had

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a highly developed sense of how language works. In each of Empson's types, the presence of duality is paramount. It occurs when an author expresses two or more meanings that do not agree but combine to make clear a complicated state of mind. That's what I like. Everything's complicated. Ambiguity in poetry is something like a multiplicity of feelings that add up to more than a simple fact. That's a reason to love poetry and to be weary of analysis. I read multiplicity in a structural way. For me 'reading' means 'reading the structure.'

Still reading Empson's book. I feel like a crusader, giving ambiguous ambitions a place in the world, in the hope that we can avoid the fact that we are completely surrounded by acres of dead material. Many things would work better if we included ambiguity in the mix.

William Empson describes two attitudes to language - one that kills it by stripping it of all association, holding it to direct meanings only, and the other attitude, one that kills language by dissipating its sense in a multiplicity of associations. He says we would do well to tread carefully between the two, but in the twenty-first century it is likely that we need a stronger presence of 'associations' because we need to 'redress the balance' of our continual over-rationalising and compartmentalising.

STEFAN

I must take some comfort from the fact that if we had shared the same opinion about the way things proceed, Alex and I would not have talked so eagerly in the early years. We are stimulated by disagreeing with each other

I remain very interested in my thoughts about “wei wu wei”: From the point of view of narcissist-theory it could mean “no action that does not align with my possibilities.” In Zen there is a Koan which reads, “I never have ambitions beyond my capacity.” This means, “I must accept the boundaries of my nature.” Do not engage with things for the sake of creating ideals or concepts if they do not coincide with the way you are. I think Alex is trying to tell me that he lives his life that way; that he cuts off from those thoughts and activities that he deems to be outside his possibilities. Is he using this as a concept to hide his self rather than find his self? The question for me is the same – am I being true or might I have false ambitions.

Notions that concern the “true self” and the “false self” are psychoanalytic concepts. When we live with a “false self” we live a neurotic life, which increases our potential to make the wrong choices and employ the wrong actions. If

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our actions have a poor motivation, if we are not in tune with our nature, we will have to make an enormous effort just to move a short distance. I call this an “adjusted action.”

This is a psychological interpretation. I think like this because a therapist’s understanding of their motivation is crucially important. I need to know if I am providing my clients with real opportunities or I’m using my sessions to avoid my own fears about not being successful enough. My motivation could be a way of circling around my own feelings of insufficiency.

Depending on my underlying motivation, my activity as an analyst could prove either useful or dysfunctional, so I have to be very careful to align my analytical skills with the task I have before me. It would be easy to cross the line and use my skills to influence and manipulate my client. This might boost my ego and allow me to avoid the suspected fear that my life is meaningless, but this is not therapy. So, I have to be conscious of what motivates me. I must have an “awareness of the motivation of my action.”

I must try to get Alex to talk about his early life. He may well have developed a “false self” for himself as a means of surviving. There is no sign that the disability in his leg affects his strong identity, but he always directs the conversation away from any talk that seeks to find out what influenced his behaviour. He wants to be accepted – no questions asked.

ALEX

I wish I could get Stefan to understand what I mean about ambiguity, but I think it is impossible. Maybe he could understand confabulation.

I am reading a wonderful book by John Berger called, *Confabulations*. In his view, confabulation is a disturbance of memory. It is the unconscious production of fabricated, distorted, or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world, without conscious intention to deceive. Individuals who confabulate present incorrect memories ranging from subtle alterations to bizarre fabrications. They are generally confident about their recollections, despite being in receipt of contradictory evidence.

Of course I like to fabricate, distort and misinterpret my memories and desires about myself. I want my imagination to fly and feel free about altering the world to suit my dreams. I want to make a fabulous world of fantastic fabrications.

John Berger again - confabulate comes from the Latin word *fabula*, which means conversation or story. In old English, a story is called a “fable.” Children ‘make up’ stories from their imagination. I want to ‘make up’ things in the same way. I want to create an enchanted world, not one that is driven by fear. I don’t want to analytically drag my ambiguity into consciousness. I want to work in a

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relaxed, tranquil place; a profound place. I want to have excited anticipation about inhabiting intense reveries, to dream about my world and go there with a sense of happiness. Reveries require an appetite for well-being, they don't lead to thoughts or give order to thoughts, they are audacious and independent.

I must stop this therapy. I don't want to present the world with my dark side. I care about people and I would like to invite them to join me in an open, clear and cheerful manner. I want to rejoice in the brightness of my days and declare the beauty I find around me. I want to quickly get back on my feet each time I fall; the same person and yet a new person. I want to play with risk and chance, like alert and wayward children do. I imagine my concerns choose me, not that I choose the concerns.

John Berger again - Consider how music finds its way into the hearts of people across the world? What do we collectively hear? What are we connecting with? Is there something we share deep in our sensitivity? When a song settles on the inside of us, we feel enclosed. This is different to every other kind of message because we are inside it.

Singers communicate with intimate sounds. They could teach us how to communicate; what to include and what not to include. They use a group of words that loosely associate with their subject, words that flow like a river on its journey to the sea; no rigid concepts.

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Can we learn from singers? Can we try to translate their method of communication for our own use?

John Berger again - Every day total strangers share an intimacy. It only takes a second to share a glance, a nod, a smile or a shrug, but the gesture invites an agreement about life. Performers and singers do this publicly. These days, words rarely help us share the experience of being alive or indicate what we are feeling. Songs refer to everyone's experience of the world.

This reminds me of my song about singing to the trees. When we identify with trees, we are receiving non-verbal messages. Their different rhythms and forms of energy are creating texts of some kind. I want to find out how to speak this text and share it. I don't want this kind of ancient experience to be wiped out. I don't want uncertainty and forgetfulness to reign. I want to learn how to put myself in the way of marvellous accidents. I want what the poet Rumi suggested we all practice.

His words were...

Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment.

STEFAN

Alex is still worried about ambiguity. I am not an expert in the use of this word and my interpretation might be inappropriate, but I believe it to be true. I use the word ambiguity in a specific way - to describe emotions – but I also have two different connotations for ambiguity. The first is that it describes a hidden unconscious part of the concerns and the second is that it describes the conflicting parts. For an analyst, this is crucial to understand. My experience informs me that most of the problems that bring people into my consulting room have their origins in the contradictory emotions my clients are not aware of; so ambiguity can be both hidden and conflicting.

The unconscious emotions and conflicts that we carry around with us, disturbs our interaction with the people in our world. We interact with those around us, we are interdependent of them and the impact we have is reciprocal. I shape the context and the context shapes me. Different things are triggered in different contexts. We experience ourselves differently in each context we inhabit.

Alex wants to create a dynamic relationship in his work, by collaging his structural and ambiguous ambitions. I am concerned with dynamic relationships between me and the contexts I find myself in. We engage in a great variety of contexts. Some inspire relaxed behaviour and others

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produce erratic or volatile behaviour. Our many dynamic relationships are played out on a ground of continual conflict between the idealisation of myself and the real self as it is mirrored by the context. This can be daunting and confusing, but the more we accept the numerous ways we have of interacting with the various contexts the better will be our resilience and acceptance of those situations that produce shocks and surprises.

Ambiguity is not the problem; not being aware of it or not accepting that ambiguity is the obstruction, is the problem. Ambiguity can be a resource for interacting with different contexts. This is why exclusive concepts are so dangerous, especially when they become dogmatic. It is not good to camp on one side of a polarity. There is a Zen phrase that reads, “a thing is just as it is,” and to my mind, a thing has ambiguity just as it is. Ambiguity is inherent in all things.

ALEX

I don't understand anything Stefan says. He just gives me little hints of his view, but they are entirely philosophic. I have no idea how philosophy can be useful.

Cecil Taylor, the celebrated jazz pianist, was once asked what makes a good jazz musician. Here is his reply.

“Practice, to be studious at your instrument, as well as looking at a bridge, or dancing, or writing a poem, or reading, or attempting to make your home more beautiful. What goes into an improvisation is what goes into our preparation. Preparation allows the prepared senses to execute a performance at the highest level, devoid of either psychological or logical interference. If you ask me, where does the form come from, I will tell you that we create out of the form that is our daily existence. This is what the day and the night are for. Form arrives out of the way we begin our day and proceed through it. What we choose to vary in our daily routine provides the fresh building blocks that enable us to construct a living form. Our daily life is easily translated into the specific act of making a musical composition.”

This I understand.

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Today Stefan again tried to talk about my youth. I told him whatever happened then has obviously influenced my behaviour, but this was so long ago. Anything I still do as a result of youthful experiences, is something I will continue to do. Dragging up events form 60+ years ago will not change my behaviour.

I told Stefan about my father who was always angry with me. I was simply the wrong kind of boy for him. I used to make him disappear. In his final years he thought I was his father. There's not much one can do with this information; it just is how it is.

STEFAN

Alex is avoiding my questions. He wants to show me how clever and creative he is. He is desperate to be loved, but he won't let anyone near him. It's not that he wants to disappear, it's more like he only wants to be seen in the light of the terms he dictates. The terms are simple – he is the master, the teacher, and we are all his students. This is the only relationship he can cope with. He thinks he is so far above everyone. For this reason he chooses issues and concerns that can't be interrogated. So the question is, why must Alex think he's different to everyone else?

When I was with Alex years ago, we talked of the dream of being outside the wall. He is like the monk who doesn't feel that he fits into the discipline of the monastery and must go his own way in the world. I talked to him about being either inside or outside the wall because I wanted to give him a warning. The one who pretends to know what is inside and outside the wall is not outside the wall but sitting on the wall. That is why he sees inside and outside.

I like to watch over the wall and, once in a while, I make a little promenade outside to enjoy the phantasy that I am outside all the walls. It is an illusion, because there is no

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such thing as being outside the wall. The walls are concentric circles and when you consider yourself outside the wall you are actually inside the next layer of walls. Those who worry about the difference between being inside or outside the wall are probably not conscious about where the walls are and where they reside in the great land of walls. When I told Alex this, he became very quiet. I think he was angry.

I must tell Alex that there are things in his personality that are in need of attention. No one will fling up their hands in horror because he is avoiding questions, but he has to accept that some people might want to assist him. He didn't invent a reason to be here, he invented a neurosis for himself. It's an obvious way of asking for help. Clearly, he needs to deal with something that's sleeping deep inside him and he shouldn't have it gnawing away at the enclosure its inhabiting; he should get to know it.

I tried again to talk about his youth, but he bats me off very efficiently. He doesn't want his early years aired. There is a dynamic here somewhere that needs to see the light of day. His father was overpowering, so Alex made him disappear, (his words). He could not ask for help; all he could do was pretend his father didn't exist. I must try to encourage him to say more about this relationship with his father.

ALEX

Stefan gave me a little lecture today about those who think they are living “outside the wall.” Me; I don’t climb walls, I’m just an outsider. Things are getting complex with all this talk about ambiguity and yet I still don’t feel that Stefan has any idea how to give the word a positive spin.

I read him this poem about a bridge.

Blossom in darkness

Beneath old buttresses fashioned from stone
A rickety old bridge whispered to me.
My underside – it said – is never shown
Few voice its virtues with hyperbole

Black flowers will blossom in my darkness
Blooming in shadows where no one will go
There’s more down here than mould and sliminess
My fragrant pageant’s not a murky show

Think of my dark mass as a place of light
Where vertical and horizontal meet
Where firmness and fluidity unite
Over opaque water, callow and deep

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Inspire reverie from my dim matter
My deserted soil is no common dirt
It's not coarse stuff foreign to your nature
It's in your dreams, immobile and inert

I'm a metaphor for your potency
Don't keep me waiting, I've no hidden stings
Fearing shadows is your deficiency
You must come down or you'll never grow wings

This is departing from the realm of individuals and attending to the world of *things*, to the active imagination that exists in objects and places. Jung once said that the term *inner*, when used in reference to the psyche, had become a word that only referred to inside the individual and as a consequence the psyche had become trapped in our personal, interior space.

Jung was interested in the boundary between a psychology of human, experiential subjectivity and a psychology of things in and of the world. He imagined that the greater part of the imagination, or soul, lay outside the body. He suggested that by ignoring this fact we would slowly come to live in an imaginatively dead world, a soul-less place filled with inanimate things. We're there already. He feared for a world where emptiness is the daily reality, where we all walk about as isolated centres of awareness.

This condition belongs to both the able bodied and those of unsound of mind. We have all lost a world that pulses with our blood and breathes with our breath. We shouldn't inhabit a world in which the word *inside* is

defined spatially, *inside* should be a form of perception that sees the *inside* of everything, including the *inside* of outside things. Some days I write poems like this.

Dithering sleepwalk

Another year gone
And still I languish,
Drinking in memory before it dies.

Attending to dreams,
Neglecting the house,
Leaving the garden to butterflies.

Sleep is quite hopeless.
I am a scarecrow,
Standing stock still, with buttons for eyes.

Haunted by nightmares,
The road without rest,
Searching around to undo goodbyes.

Dithering sleepwalk,
Past the dull wasteland,
Lost, but still eager to fantasize.

Leaving no traces,
Frozen winds blowing,
I cherish the dream, despite the lies.

My hopeless yearning,
Hits fading echoes
On distant peaks and never survives.

STEFAN

Alex read a poem about a bridge: Walking on the bridge or under the bridge is not relevant, providing I accept that the bridge has an “on the bridge” and an “under the bridge” aspect to it – it might even have more possibilities. I should be aware where I am and let the relationship between me and the bridge happen, no matter on which side I am. I have to listen to the bridge!

If I neglect the relationship between me and the bridge, if I neglect the ambiguity here, I could well become deluded, believing that the actual information I have is complete. This would definitely give me cause for concern.

Accepting ambiguity is accepting that we are only ever receiving partial information; that there is always more to it. Accepting ambiguity is accepting inherent information for what it is.

Knowing the tricks and strategies that Alex plays is one thing but knowing how to invite him away from this way of behaving is something else. I think he probably learnt to be this way from a very early age. I have decided to try to get closer to his way of thinking, so I wrote a poem in the way that Alex might write a poem

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*My keyboard is moving my fingers,
pretending it's the source in my brain.
I read and understand the words.
The origin I do not know.
My keyboard and fingers play a merry dance.
Where the music comes from, I do not know.*

I don't feel as much satisfaction from my words as Alex does from his. I get stuck in the belief that everything I have ever said or written has already been said or written many times before. I imagine that the information is stored in the eternal mind of the universe, or whatever we call this space. The issue is not by whom something is said, but how and when it becomes evidence. Things repeatedly become information through different people at different times. It is in the things we find, not the things we invent. We understand things we do not invent things. We pretend to invent things but in truth we pick up information that has been in the universe a long time.

I still didn't manage to draw out anything from Stefan concerning his father. He refuses to believe that it has any relevance, so I am certain it's deeply significant. I am reminded of a therapist who was a client of mine. He was married to another therapist. The two had worked together when they were young practitioners. She was the only person he allowed to be critical of him. Mostly she talked of the behaviour he adopted to avoid relationships. He told her she was emotionally distant.

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After a while they became more intimate, spurred on by their lack of shame about the things they admitted to each other. Then their relationship became sexual and eventually they married. She continued to offer him insightful analysis and she made him feel understood, but he didn't feel desired. He could talk to her about everything but his sexual fantasies. This he called his dark side, because he wanted to misbehave and dominate her. He couldn't talk to anyone about this and he felt powerless to affect the relationship. He was very unhappy. I sense that there is a similar unhappiness in Alex. More work needs to be done.

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This is a poem by Jack Spicer. He alleged that he picked things up from the universe.

I thought of Spicer today because yesterday Stefan asked me if I thought originality existed. What do I care about this? Everyone can choose their own myths. Spicer wrote what he described as “dictated” poetry. For Spicer, a poet acts as a receptive host for language, rather than as an agent of self-expression. He claimed he received his poetry from “Martian” sources or from the dead, and he likened the poet to a radio, receiving transmissions. He said the best condition for a poem is one of not-knowing, believing that poets have a better chance of achieving this with “dictation” than self-expression. Too much thinking if you ask me, but *Any fool can get into an ocean* is a cracking good poem, nevertheless.

More words from Stefan about my father, power and asking for help. I know I don't have any power over other people. I never have. I am used to it. I just get on with my own world. I can't be battling other people for space. It is futile and I don't need it. I only need my own work and that work does not need recognition.

STEFAN

Alex is afraid of the void. He pretends he is someone who occupies a space ship that he can navigate around the universe with extragalactic sensitivity.

I live my life in a context. I am constantly interacting with it; we are playing out a life of interdependency. We tend to think that our mind is the active part of us, the machinery that creates an awareness of this interaction. This is how we experience and describe it, but there is another way to view this: it is not awareness **of** the interaction, it is awareness **as** a result of the interaction.

Interaction creates impersonal information, and this becomes 'mind' in each of us. There is no such thing as an isolated 'I' with an active mind. The 'I' and the context are in a constant interdependency - it is a polarity. The mind is not the 'I' nor is it the context, it is the result of the information which originates in the polarity between the two. This might be the mood you feel on an emotional level.

There are two types of poles: positive and negative. This represents the electrical *potential* at the ends of a circuit. A battery has a positive terminal and a negative terminal. Interconnection of electrical devices demands that the correct polarity is maintained. When the poles interact, an undefined energy is created. We will get a different result

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depending on what kind of resistance we put between the two poles: this can cause light, heat or movement. Our brain is the resistance that transforms the impersonal information and welcomes it into personal information. This is why we all have our own way of experiencing the same reality. The experience and resulting information of our actual interaction is unique and the mind that results from this is exclusive and exceptional.

Every moment is unique. It has its own state of mind, which is why we should exercise our awareness and keep our brain in good shape. The mind does not create, the mind is created by actual information molded by our brain functions; such as memory, cognition, analysis, awareness and the ability to ascribe value to things.

To understand “who I am”, and this is the main concern of philosophy and spirituality, we need to accept that we are not who we think we are or who we think others want us to be. We need to discover the interdependency of the ‘I’ within every context of every moment, with all its possible ambiguities. This can be frightening. Avoiding the real task is the problem, not the ambiguity itself.

ALEX

I think Stefan has lost his marbles. As I was leaving today, he said, “welcome to the void, welcome to a world which only offers us uncertainty and insecurity.”

He only talks about himself. I have no idea what to say.

If I don't understand what Stefan says. If it is too difficult to comprehend, surely, I should leave the therapy sessions.

I wonder what, out of all my words, gave him the impression that I have lost the thread? It makes me think that my therapy sessions are not about him trying to understand me, but rather an opportunity for him to expound his best theories. I definitely do not want to be welcomed into the void. I don't live in a void or a place of uncertainty and insecurity.

Stefan talks of the void as if it is a vast chasm inside us. We talked a bit about picking things up from the universe because I read him the Spicer poem. He said we must decide whether we are the originators of the material we produce or not. I'm confused. I don't feel driven to understand who I am, and I'm not interested in what he regards as philosophy and spirituality. It all sounds far too transcendent. I want to be in the here and now in a modest,

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Respectful and intimate form of contact with all other things. No emptiness please, and I don't want to accept that I am not who I think I am or what I think others want me to be? I just want to dance and sing. What's wrong with that? We should send the analysts and therapists to a playgroup if this is what they think.

Last week I found my favourite Zen saying. Stefan likes to quote from the Zen practitioners, so I read it to him today. I like to keep him entertained with new thoughts. This piece of writing is from Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Japanese Zen.

*Whoever told people that 'Mind' means
thoughts, opinions, ideas, and concepts?
Mind means trees, fence posts, tiles and grasses.*

It is an amazing statement. I don't know what it means exactly, yet I fully understand it. It is ambiguous. It hints at finding a connection with the material world, something that suggests the presence of a material imagination.

Anything can be a vessel for imagination, whether it is part of the world out there, such as a chair or a tree, or part of the world inside us.

STEFAN

Alex read a beautiful Zen poem today. He really loves the idea that a fence post has a mind, because it is radical and places him outside of normal reasoning. He doesn't realise that this place is crucial for directing ordinary social interaction in the world. Maybe he will always insist on being the esoteric teacher. It is strange to be so insistent and yet so afraid. He is certainly afraid of being lost in philosophy. Most people are afraid of being lost in life.

I must continually check that I am not using philosophy and analysis as shields, as tools to defend me in the analytic environment. In real life they only partially defend me. When I am experiencing conflicts of an emotional or a relationship nature, philosophy and analysis do not work as shields.

This worries me. I am vulnerable, but that is life.

I am also worried that there will be no trace of me when I'm gone. When artists die, their objects, their art, keep their spirit alive. For analysts, the analysing is over when they're gone! This we all have and we often refer to it as a feeling of "emptiness." I call it the void, as it is the interface between two polarities.

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Nothing of either side exists in this vacuum, but both sides begin here. It is more accurate to say that they exist and do not exist - they are “neither this nor that” and yet they are “this as well as that,” simultaneously. It is barely possible to describe this strange place, but still we desire to be there and at the same time we fear it. That is why I think we should circle around it – trying not to fall into it and trying not to get stuck between the polarities.

I’m the inventor of my void, no-one else, so I must attempt to interpret the situation. Alex should begin to tease out those things in his early life that may have caused him to want to disappear. It is only recently that he has invented a suitable reason/metaphor for his life’s difficulty; this strange need for silence. Maybe there is a scar that was recently re-opened. There is no reason to doubt his chances of connecting with it if he is prepared to engage fully in the therapeutic process.

I must not give up the ambition to get Alex to talk about his lack of power. He says he has no influence over his wife and doesn’t care. But he does. He gets frustrated when she wields power over him. He hates feeling powerless and he can’t ask anyone to help him.

ALEX

Today I asked Stefan for a certificate of health to show my partner I'm not weird. He was upset, but I hate going there every week. We get nowhere. How can a therapist talk about the void and blame their client for being afraid of it. I just want to live in it, not escape from it. I checked out what the physicists say about the void in the universe and found Carlo Rovelli's book, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*.

“The elementary particles that sway in the space around us like miniscule moving wavelets, disappear and reappear according to the strange laws of quantum mechanics, where everything that exists is never stable, and is nothing but a jump from one interaction to another.

Even if we observe a small empty region of space, in which there are no atoms, we still detect a minute swarming of these particles. There is no such thing as a real void, one that is completely empty. Just as the calmest sea, looked at closely, sways and trembles, however slightly, so the fields that form the world are subject to minute fluctuations, and it is possible to imagine its basic particles having brief and ephemeral existences, continually created and destroyed by these movements.”

I spent twenty years teaching creative processes to students who would get stuck because they had no process to explore; they thought they could rely on lonely concepts.

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I had to continually get them out of the void by using the playful dance of process, open ended exploration and trusting in the work their pen could do without them getting in the way. If you trust and play you generally don't spend your days feeling empty.

To avoid the void practice borrowing.
Live like a collage artist and find things to use.
Re-interpret the meaning of old things.
Allow yourself the luxury of 'reading between the lines.'
Allow yourself to rise up spontaneously.
Edit continuously.
Make editorial leaps and wild suppositions.
Make composite constructions.
Continually translate and expand.
Don't make demands on things to become something.
Get close to things with your eyes closed.
Respect the primary material.
Be faithful to the grace of the original.
Love learning from the felicities of other artists.
Don't predict, only discover.
Make multi-layered medleys of tales
Make quilts of many different materials.
Speed, chance and play keep preconceptions at bay.
Allow narratives to rise up in an unpredictable fashion.
Join things together before judgement arises.
Acceptance is key.
Invitation is key.
Attitude is everything.

STEFAN

Alex asked today if I could give him a certificate of health to show his partner that he isn't abnormal and to enable him to cease our therapy.

I am sad, it depresses me that such a talented person like Alex doubts himself so much! He wants an authority that certifies he's normal and he needs absolution for being the way he is. The worst thing is that he thinks his wife needs this proof, but I am convinced his doubts about his mental health lie within himself.

Maybe, he doesn't doubt his mental health, but he is deeply unhappy about being powerless. He won't talk about his father and getting him to talk about his wife is even more of a taboo subject.

There must be a part of Alex that does not want to acknowledge that he is a gifted artist. This situation gives me the feeling, that I am reaching my limits as an analyst. I begin to doubt my ability to mirror him, allow him to discover who he is and what he can be. I don't think I give him the context that allows him to experience himself positively. This means there is something between us which gives us the notion that we are not being good enough. Should I stop the therapeutic setting with Alex?

I must remember that Alex gives me a new approach to art and a new way of looking at and experiencing the world. I feel guilty because I don't manage to create the same kind of adventure playground that he creates for me.

Many years ago we managed to discuss our beliefs as friends do; we were curious about our very different ways of looking at the world. It was not a professionally correct decision to meet outside of the therapeutic environment and I made the right choice when I passed him on to Kathy. I can't do this again. We now have a mission to accomplish, even though it seems we are working in an unfavourable situation.

Alex flees from me out of fear of being caught, of being touched. I am lame out of fear of not being able to accomplish the task I have laid out for myself. All clever talking and writing is useless when it leads us to the point where we are not content.

ALEX

If Stefan was the psychoanalyst, James Hillman and we were discussing notions of the *Anima Mundi* I would enjoy myself, but all this invented theory about why I shouldn't withdraw from the world is crazy. Does he think my life has lost its psychological importance because I don't want to play at analysing as he does?

Stefan is definitely afraid that I am over interested in connecting with the psychic depths of the world. He thinks this is a big philosophic issue, but it's not. I just like more shapes, colours, atmospheres and textures than he does.

It is good to believe that material things show their faces; that they speak, announce themselves and bear witness to their presence. Hillman said, "The more we confine interiority to within the individual, the more we lose the sense of soul as a psychic reality within all things."

He is not saying that things or objects feel, that they are inhabited by spirits, but he is giving voice to the greater psyche and how we could view the world of imagination. For him, psyche is not only experience, it is also sensuality. Things present themselves to us as images, so psyche can be seen as an image and imagination can be something that comes in the form of display. He is moving away from the world of experience to a place where material things actually demand our attention. So the bridge is not an

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artefact that is passive beneath our gaze, it is an active, inspirational object of the world. The imagination is pre-eminently in things, out there, not inside us. This notion frightens Stefan for it expresses a wildly creative aspect. He wants to gather these things up and claim them but taming and naming the soul of things makes them powerless. We should not try to drag them safely into our world, we should rather follow them into the mysterious depths of their world.

I know I am only talking about my inner world. I don't want to talk about my relationships with people. They have never been successful. My relationship to my students was always fine. I can be a teacher, but I can't be dealing with my piers or my partnerships. I always end up having to concede. It's exhausting and there is nothing I can do about it. I only fight if my life is threatened. And if my life wants to quietly disappear, then who should stop me?

STEFAN

I am searching around for something to say to Alex. He is so difficult to get hold of. Always shifting his shape and flying off at tangents. He seriously wants to be left alone and yet he yearns for interaction. He is a child, desperately wanting to dominate everything. He leaves no space for anyone. That's why he wants to be the only one inhabiting his space in silence.

I have just remembered a previous client; his case is relevant. The man had lost his mother while still very young. He stayed with different grandparents, aunts and uncles; every day in a different place with different people. He could not establish boundaries in any of the spacious surroundings he lived in. He was under strain from the many relations who surrounded him. There was no continuity in his relationships, nobody he could share valuable time with over any length of time.

The quality one needs, if one is to develop consistent feelings about oneself, is to be the same person throughout all the diverse moods and different environments one encounters. This man could not develop a harmonious and stable image of himself. He never found a reliable context or sense of continuity, so he never developed a consistent self-image. He wasn't there for himself.

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He was a creative and interesting artist; always the centre of attention. He could change his personality and create many different kinds of art object but he felt lost when making connections in a personal context. His relationships were never intimate, for he feared intimacy, but what he feared more than intimacy was being on his own. A fear of the void was so strong it was his permanent anxiety. He likened the experience of being by himself to travelling at the speed of light through the Galaxy. In this situation he does not know where he is going and he is not in charge of the steering wheel.

I asked him to carry out an experiment. He was to look at himself every day in a mirror for as long as possible. In the beginning, he found it impossible, but after great efforts he eventually managed to carry out the experiment. Once he was successful at it, he realised that he is never alone; there is always someone with him: himself.

He was shocked when he learned this. It takes a long time to right these kind of contradictions. I think Alex also has a complex set of contradictions, but I can't quite find the right advice for him. Alex's problems lie partly in the opposite direction. He is not afraid of the void and he loves being on his own, but I am beginning to think that he, like my client, mistrusts intimacy.

ALEX

Stefan was cross with me today. He pretended not to be, but I know he was offended. I told him that I only wanted to speak to analysts who were interested in Archetypal Psychology. It's obvious to see why this is true but Stefan doesn't get it.

I found this statement by Jenifer Sandoval. I will give it to Stefan next week.

“The poetic basis of mind occurs for those who interpret poetically, as opposed to literally, those who see through the physical reality or ‘fact’ that is presented, and using imagination grasps a more meaningful reality given by soul. Looking at the events of one’s life metaphorically or mythologically imbues life with a poetic beauty and an imagined meaning, which may be a truer meaning. Imagination is invoked to behold the metaphor that lies beyond literal ‘reality’ and a new, equally valid and ‘real’ experience of life rich with significance is encountered. The poetic basis of mind can be seen as the shift away from the literal to the metaphorical, from the quantitative question of “how much?” to the qualitative question of “how does this matter?” It is the move from form to the idea behind form, from the limited personal ego to the impersonal ego as an expression of psyche, as infinite possibility given by

soul. The importance and validity of the reality given by imagination is the poetic basis of mind that becomes the lens through which all other ideas might be understood.”

I only want to stay with the poetic basis of mind.
Here's a poem by Leah Umansky.

A Real Poem –

1.

In love, there are times where unprecedented things
happen.

I'll just say it here: I have never been to battle,

but I battle every day.

We speak a part. Studies show this. We speak a part,
as we are made of parts. We are partly made of mothers.

2.

There's only two moments in a life,

but I don't want to talk about

Authority. I know there is no expiration date.

3.

The great bird of me is on guard.

The great bird of me is discovering the floor

and the ceiling of this life.

I am not endorsing dramatics; I am merely stating the
obvious.

Everything comes down to power.

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4.

I'm not interested in conquest, but in value.
We can decide the way we are spoken to.
I am deciding it now.

5.

I can hear hope everywhere.
Poetry is lonely times,
But poetry is also language,
And also social,
It is about personhood.
I choose sound.
It is a way to enter.
It is a way.

This poem is for
you Stefan from
your fellow
talker who's
adamant that he
will not
enter
the
sea
of
horrid
philosophy,
he will only enter
the
poetic
sea.

STEFAN

Sometimes Alex makes me laugh, but I try not to show it; I shouldn't approve of him when he is playing the naughty child. I spent today trying to convince him to continue with the sessions. I told him I wouldn't give him any more theory and I would leave my concepts at home. This pleased him, so I told him that his responses inspired me and helped me shape my thinking. I hope our mind dance can continue for a little while yet.

I have just returned from an interesting conference.

Luc Ciompi, who pioneered drug-free treatment for schizophrenics, was talking about the importance of the connections we make between our feeling and thinking. He used the term *emotion-logic* to describe the interaction between the two components, feeling and thinking, or sensation and cognition. These components interact continually within each of us, but the quality of this interaction determines how well we function in the world.

While listening to Ciompi, I thought maybe I could describe the difference between an artist and an analyst in a similar fashion. The former, being someone who creates and edits objects with insight and sensitivity, and the latter, being one who dissects and analyses actions by using cognitive process. We tend to do what we can do best. The important thing being to recognize when the balance of

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thinking and feeling is not on an even keel, for then we should try to get the balance back.

Maybe poems also operate between the polarities, at the interface of emotion and logic. A perfect poem would come from this place, a phenomena our minds cannot describe or quantify because it exists and does not exist at the same time. Do the poems we connect with dance around this enigmatic, dynamic place? They don't describe it, but they hint that it exists and we have to accept this hint as being good enough.

Today I met someone who studied psychology and philosophy. We discovered that we both enjoyed the book, *Zen, and the art of motorcycle maintenance*, by Robert M. Pirsig, and we talked about *Quality*. I told him about Alex and our various discussions on the topic of ambiguity. He told me about a term called *ambiguity-tolerance*. It's an indicator that defines a person's ability to accept ambiguity: whether their feelings for it are neutral or whether they see it as a threat.

An ability to accept ambiguity despite the way it makes us feel. This is interesting. Alex's way of being would add a third category to those of neutrality and fear that currently play on the indicator scales. He would be one who thinks of ambiguity as a gain.

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Today I wrote a poem about the enigmatic, dynamic place that lies between the polarities.

*Trapped in polarity, we try to be sure
We miss clearness and fear ambiguity
We can only swing around the enigma
Believing that our attempt is good enough*

Reality can be described in many different ways. It never exactly hits the real; we just swing around it.

I must stop thinking about the comparisons between the artist and the analyst; it is not useful for Alex. I probably engage in this because I am lost and Alex will not let the conversation drift to an analysis of his behaviour. He only wants to talk about his inner world and this excludes everyone with whom he has a relationship.

ALEX

I liked Stefan's invitation to continue. He was flattering me a little. We agreed to a few conditions, so that we wouldn't enter into each other's mine fields. I had to insist once again that I'm not afraid of being lost in philosophy, I just don't want it as an approach to anything I do. Of course there are many philosophies; I'm thinking predominantly of the rational-logical kind. I told him that I don't mind Taoism, if this, in its original form, could be regarded as a philosophy. My old friend, Lao Tzu, starts his first stanza of the Tao Te Ching with this...

*The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.*

He starts the second stanza with this...

*Therefore, having and not having ascend together.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short contrast each other:
High and low rest upon each other;
Voice and sound harmonize each other;
Front and back follow one another.
Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing,
teaching without talking.*

STEFAN

I am still very surprised by our differences, but I have a newfound delight in reading poems since Alex joined me for therapy. I suppose we are both boys and boys always like to fight about something. It begins with toys, moves on to sport and develops into discussions about philosophy and spiritual matters. The activity remains the same, regardless of the content of the fight. It is a healthy way of being creative and feeling alive.

There is no difference between the boy and the old man, between artist and analyst, they do the same in a different way. The brain insistently demands activation and stimulation; the goal is to keep it running efficiently.

Talking from a neuropsychological perspective can be useful. The neurotransmitters are constantly interacting back-and-forth. This is a complex activity that our brain must enact while it's alive. It is important that the back-and-forth interplay is well balanced. It is inevitable that stress will occur when our excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmitters are out of balance. Stress will also occur if we try to constantly push ourselves to work at a level of interaction that is too high.

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The constant interplay of neurotransmitters defines our perception and generates our mood. We do not entirely know if the mind is aware of what activity is going on, or if the mind is producing the activity, but it is incontrovertible that something is permanently at work here.

It is important to consider the kind of meanings and cognitive notions we ascribe to this activity. Being able to act with mindfulness and awareness is the most significant issue.

I ask myself if Alex acts with mindfulness and awareness and in a certain manner he does, but he must control all the conditions affecting him in order to do this. He cannot do this if others around him are having an effect upon him. Can it be that he can only operate alone?

ALEX

What in the world can I do with Stefan. Today he talked about some empty place at the polarities. What can he mean? Here's a poem from the 9th century by Li Shangyin. Does this come from that empty place at the polarities?

Under deep-set layered curtains
 in her Carefree Hall
She rests and then the quiet night-time
 lingers slowly on.
It has always been a dream,
 the life a goddess lives;
There's really never been a lover
 where the maiden dwells.
The windswept waves aren't aware
 that chestnut stems are frail;
In moonlit dew, who gets the cassia
 leaves to smell so fine?
Although we say that out of love
 there's nothing to be gained
We have yet to stop the heartache
 of this crazy passion.

It is ambiguous and it sits in a strange, dynamic place, but is it any good? Stefan was talking things being 'good enough'. Who is to say? Who defines what is perfect and what should be relegated to *good enough*? Maybe those

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who are most highly tuned to the ambiguity should do it – the Kings of ambiguity. But who are they?

We are all entitled to declare what painting or poem strikes a chord with us. This is the contract about being involved in art. I love the Chinese poem. It has all the wonderful ambiguous qualities of late twentieth century abstract poetry. So the answer for Stefan is that art and poetry are about taste and the ineffable things that make connections for each of us. There's no getting hold of this kind of thing. Either one enjoys it or one doesn't.

If one is an analyst dealing with people who have lost their way, the rules of poetry don't apply. Analysts have a real job to do and I greatly respect them for it. The spirits they lift stay lifted; goodness doesn't just disappear. This kind of work must have checks, definitions and indicators, but these things are not useful when attempting to approach art or poetry. Poetic qualities sit in the polarity opposite to analysing, not in some kind of space between feeling and thinking. It's a place of pleasurable experience. If one thinks of meditation or the kind of alpha state that artists often work in, it's a magical, sustaining place and certainly a pleasurable one.

I must get Stefan to talk about gaining pleasure from a poem, not of how to describe its worth. Here is another poem by Carlos Almeida. It gives me pleasure. I enjoy the way he offers me a congenial scene and gives me a

profound empty place to rest my thoughts in. It is about something impossible, like love, and it hints at the kind of place Stefan speaks of, a place that is situated between action and no action.

The minstrel

The Vizier's second wife reads poems
In her private garden where the soaring
Palms and delicate flowers are nourished by
Water channelled from ornate tiled fountains.

Veiled by shrubs, a minstrel strums his lute,
Searching for sonorous notes to play her.
He tries out delicate words for new songs;
Furtive attempts to restore connection.

In his errant youth he loved her too much
And was banished for voicing affection.
In wayward old age he loves her too much
But his lyrics now confound detection.

He does not try to invite attention,
Does not praise her ethereal presence,
He's there, nearby, like a gossamer cloud
Of dandelion down held on a leaf.

It's everything and nothing and it enjoys being where it is, so we must not try to grab it by the scruff of the neck and haul it to another place. Just enjoy it or leave it be.

STEFAN

Today, Alex was shocked. I told him that it didn't matter what we talked about providing we enjoyed the struggle with finding words and concepts, or non-concepts. If we wished we could also talk about sporting events; there is no difference as far as the brain is concerned. The brain doesn't make value judgements about content. It is just important that we keep the cogs moving and we feel good about doing that.

He told me I should either enjoy a poem or leave it be. I agree. It is the reading of a poem, the stimulation of our mind and the awareness of being alive that is important. This frees us from having to constantly rant and rave and analyse everything!

I am reminded of the disagreement Alex and I had about the meaning of the Taoist saying "wei wu wei."
He said it meant "effortless doing."
I said it meant "doing out of the right motive."
Now I have a new possibility: "keeping the right level and balance of our neurotransmitters."

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I met a friend last night who told me about his research activity. It is a study on how people with disorders like diabetes, long-term pain and tinnitus etc. cope with their chronic condition. The results show that the problem itself does not define how much the patient is suffering. How the patient handles and assesses the symptoms and the illness is much more important.

The interpretation of the event and the meaning I give to it determine how well I cope with the situation and how much I suffer. This is more important than the degree of the illness itself.

I also learned that there is a new way of seeing the placebo effect. It is much more important and relevant than we initially thought and it is now measurable in experiments. It appears to be linked to the relationships between the people who are interacting around the treatment. It is affected by the patient's interpretation of what is going on in the relationship and the meaning those involved give to it. This determines how the information is interpreted and how effective the medication is.

When I bring all this together, it seems that the relationship, the interaction of subject with object, is the most important thing. The analyst focussing on the mind, the artist focussing on what they are making; we are always relating and interacting with something. I want to know how much the quality of the product has to do with the interactions that surround it. These are the relationships we establish with what we're doing or observing.

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I want to know if the relationship of the active party with the object is influencing the relationship of the viewer with the object. With these thoughts I return to Pirsig who said, “Quality is the relationship between subject and object.”

I have been using relationships as a metaphor in the hope that Alex will talk more about his relationships. My conversations with him open up more questions than they answer. How can I bring ambiguity and our feelings of emptiness into this quality and awareness debate? How can I get him to talk about relationships? He simply refuses. He likes to help others, but he does not want help from anyone. He trusts no one.

ALEX

Stefan said he would stop philosophizing, but he can't stop. I insist on no philosophy. I spent so many years teaching young people how to escape feelings of emptiness and mostly it arose out of their quirky philosophizing. In art and design, feelings of emptiness are referred to as creative block. Every teacher knows that if we know how to trust and play, if we are able to activate creative processes, we can invent worlds that are alive with action. We do it by making, not thinking. We look and act on our intuition, using our sensitivity, we do not ask questions of the mind. Maybe only artists know this.

This is why the notion of having a *concept* is so insidious; a harmful rationalisation that one has to do battle with. My students found it difficult to realise how damaging the word *concept* is, so I simply banned them from using the word.

I also don't understand why Stefan is so insistent upon using terms like quality and awareness. He was talking to me about paintings, and how the relationship of the originator with the object influences the relationship of the viewer with the object. I have no idea what he has been reading or why it is important to him.

John Berger says: a painting is finished when.... "the foreseen ideal moment of its *being looked at* is filled, as the painter feels, or calculates, it ought to be. The long or short process of painting a picture is the process of constructing

such a moment. Of course, the painting's *moment-of-being-looked-at* cannot be entirely foreseen and thus completely filled by the painting. Nevertheless, every painting is, by its very nature, addressed to such a moment." He continues. "The language of pictorial art, because it is static, is the language of such timelessness. Yet what it speaks about – unlike geometry – is the sensuous, the particular and the ephemeral."

I don't mind talking about relations, interactions and placebos, but I am not listening to someone who thinks there is no difference in value between one discussion and another - chatting about sport-events being as good as anything else is bewildering and I resent the implication. I know I shouldn't.

For five thousand years the Aboriginal tribes of Australia carried out wars with neighbours and sang songs along lines that covered the country. Both activities keep neurotransmitters chugging along, but I want to make a distinction between war and singing. In order to sing, we must make ourselves available. I love the term availability. It does more to grow the world than conflict. In Aboriginal belief, an unsung land is a dead land; each person had songs to sing and these enlivened the land. A person's verses were his title deeds to his territory. The song lines were routes for trading things, but primarily they were routes for trading songs.

I will invite Stefan to trade songs with me.

STEFAN

Today I saw how many people had visited my web page in the last year. 400. I told myself, be humble and satisfied with this. Later I learned that the website's daily backup application also counts as a visit, so 365 of those supposed visitors were routine maintenance. 35 visitors per year. I do not need to encourage myself to adopt a humble attitude, it is the only option I have. I want to mention this to Alex to gage his reaction to the issue of gaining attention.

I have been thinking of Alex's reaction to my notion that we are just like boys competing. Actually, the word isn't important. We can refer to this activity as, competing, struggling or searching. The important point about our actions is that we are alerting our awareness to the connections we make between different worlds. When polarities oppose the energy begins to flow and a third energy can arise out of it. So, we are composing the merry dance of the brain and the bones.

Alex dislikes me talking from a neuropsychological viewpoint. He hates the role of mechanics. He sees it as a restriction. He dislikes paradigms that show us how the brain is working for itself. He doesn't realise that we can do this and still be aware of the primary role played by our emotional selves. Our mood and the sense we have when we feel ourselves is related to someone and something.

ALEX

Stefan wanted to know if I wrote to gain attention. I don't know why he doesn't listen to me. Perhaps he doesn't believe me. Almost everyone I know has absolutely no interest in the things I am writing or thinking about. I'm OK with this. Apart from a handful of Chinese students, a few Swiss, a woman from Venezuela and a man from Spain, no one has any interest in what I am doing. I have no reputation as a writer, so who should know me? I read this situation as normal. It is of course disappointing that it's so difficult to make connections. Connection is crucial.

I don't understand why Stefan still talks of 'emptiness' or why ambiguity - my word - should become an issue. I feel dumb. I just stay quiet, reading John Berger. The following is a precis from a section of his book called, "and our faces, my heart, brief as photos." Beautiful title.

The language of pictorial art is timelessness. Art and poetry are both work. Pain and pleasure are both mysteries. Most of the language we use in writing is indifferent. Poetry incites caring and speaks straight to the wound. Poetry makes language care because it renders everything intimate. The intimacy is the result of the poem's labour, the result of the bringing-together-into-intimacy of every act and noun and event and perspective to which the poem refers. There is nothing more substantial to place against the cruelty and indifference of the world than this caring.

Novalis, an 18th century German romantic poet, said,

Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason. He also said that *Philosophy is really homesickness, it is the urge to be at home everywhere.* I will tell Stefan about this. We cannot be at home everywhere. What is it to be at home?

For nomadic people, home is erected where they stop. For settled people home is primarily their dwelling place and then their village. Home is the centre of the world, what Mircea Eliade called, “at the heart of the real.” Everything that makes sense is real and everything outside of this is chaos. Without a home at the centre of the real, we are lost in unreality, a place of non-being where everything is fragmentation.

Home is the centre of the world because it is the place where a vertical line crosses a horizontal one. The vertical line is a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards to the underworld. The horizontal line represents the traffic of the world, all the possible roads leading across the earth to other places. When nomadic people erected a tent pole, they established this vertical line.

It’s our nostalgia for home that keeps the expectation alive. In the 21st century we create substitute homes; places held together by memory and our habits. Habits are our domestic practices, the secular rituals we enact, they are how we perform on a daily basis. They are home. It has nothing to do with a building.

All this comes from John Berger. I would like to have had weekly chats with him.

STEFAN

Some weeks ago, Alex said that an art object succeeds well if it evokes in the viewer feelings similar to those that the artist intended. Maybe this is why some art survives for centuries! The same might apply to the value of a discussion. More important than the content is the connection between the people in discussion - both with the subject and with each other. This is why I define quality as the connection and the commitment. This might be what makes the difference. A discussion or a speech is as interesting as the speaker's connection with his subject. If his enthusiasm is intense and profound, we read it and connect with it. It is possible that the quality of anyone who creates something to offer others can often be estimated by their enthusiasm.

The brain can function without the pre-requisite of some display of quality; its activity is not dependent on external objects. Is our brain taking a concept hostage, giving it a pretext to be active, or is our brain truly connected to what it has in mind? We should be aware of these possibilities. Being connected means that emotions are involved. Quality, from this point of view, arises when cognition, feeling and activity are connected. Maybe this is what the 'quality discussion' is about. We need to be connected to people and to what we are doing, for that is how spirit and mood arises.

I am thinking through this as I do not believe Alex feels

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a suitable connection to therapy and I'm wondering if the exercise is worth continuing.

I wish I could convince Alex that our attitude to this need to be connected to people is not dissimilar to our attitude to love. Few admit they don't have a clue how to describe love, but we hardly ever come across anyone who has anything informative to say about it. All we can do is try to know what we have; to be honest about the evidence and not cover it up. Sometimes we need help to do this and sometimes we must go out into the world, being intuitive, trusting to fate and using our imagination. Alex knows how to perform the latter set of conditions, but he rejects help.

ALEX

With poetry and songs we listen deeply, because they invite us to gather up our impressions and sit them behind the language and the melody – the things that we know. Songs can lure you into welcoming old dreams that have been waiting for your articulation, the kind of day dream enjoyed while gazing at clouds. Songs can settle on the inside of us and make us feel enclosed. When music travels, how does it find its way into so many hearts and cultures? What do we collectively hear? What are we connecting with? Is there something we share, deep in our sensitivity? These songs are about repercussions and returns, welcomes and farewells. Absence is what inspired them and it's what they address. When we share a song of a long-lost place our sense of absence is less solitary, less silent. Once we know this experience intimately, we can travel without leaving our past behind; the memory of a song in a place continues to connect with us, transforming us slowly – perhaps in a way similar to the way sand is changed by the wind.

What could be finer than to conjure landscapes out of delicate sounds, creating echoes that prompt memories of another time and place, sounds that could have arrived on the wind or washed up by a wave. We might imagine that the singer in a club is singing on a mountain, as the old pipers did, filling the heavens with memories of a silent world where women tell tales, indulgent with their illusions and generous with their imagination.

Here's a poem by the great Irish poet, Moya Cannon.

Carrying the Songs.

*Those in power write the history,
those who suffer write the songs.*

Frank Harte

It was always those with little else to carry
who carried the songs
to Babylon,
to the Mississippi –
some of these last possessed less than nothing
did not own their own bodies
yet, three centuries later,
deep rhythms from Africa,
stowed in their hearts, their bones,
carry the world's songs.

For those who left my county,
girls from Downings and the Rosses
who followed herring boats north to Shetland
gutting the sea's silver as they went
or boys from Ranafast who took the Derry boat,
who slept over a boat in a bothy,
songs were their soul's currency
the pure metal of their hearts,

to be exchanged for other gold,
other songs which rang out true and bright
when flung down
upon the deal boards of their days.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It is profound and enchanting to hear a voice, sweet as liquid gold, filling the air with the resonance of distant lands, inviting timeless meanings.

I will read this to Stefan, because he told me that if I don't feel connected to the therapy then we should stop. I want to connect differently to the way Stefan wants to connect. We have been trying to find possible connections between our two very different worlds, but I think we both agree that we are miles apart. Stefan is concerned with the individual psyche and I'm concerned with the collective psyche. He wants to dream about the mechanics of the brain and I want to dream about the resonance of the bones.

If your mind seeks a truth for it,
Silence it with your heart.

STEFAN

This week we talked about *being at home*. Alex spoke of Novalis, who was a *magical idealist*. He believed he was the intermediary or mediator between the human and the absolute, the divine. *Being at home* everywhere means feeling connected to the absolute and therefore, being homesick is missing the holy. Novalis felt the holy in his absolute love for a woman called Sophie. It was easy for him to hold on to this belief because his beloved Sophie was dead; he did not have to connect with her at the level where everyday issues were involved.

Alex also likes Mircea Eliade, who was a *magical realist*. Eliade believed that traditions and mythologies offer us an image of the reality we crave, they make sense of our world and give it meaning. Gaining this sense gives us the feeling that we are *at home*.

I encouraged him to talk more about nomadic people. I think it brought out his better side. I want to tell him that we need to be *at home* in reality and we also need love for the absolute and the sacred. We are on the ground and our quest is the sky. Without an ability to balance this polarity, we are lost. This is where the fear of getting lost in the void starts. It's then that our fear causes fragmentation and we start to fall to pieces. This is how we lose the experience of our self as real. We want to be unique, but we also want to be connected. This is the existential drama; we want to belong and want our autonomy at the same time.

We need to have a home without feeling trapped. This is the magical omnipresent polarity of being human.

Trusting that we can find a balance in this polarity is what gives us the inner feeling of *being at home*. In contrast to this, anxiety makes us feel homesick. Maybe we could say anxiety is a kind of homesickness: a fear of fragmentating and falling apart. This is an existential experience where we no longer feel we are in our body, or that we know ourselves. When we're afraid of falling into the void, when we feel emptiness, there is at least one saving grace and this is the 'I' who is doing the feeling. This 'I' is where the mending and connecting process starts.

Mark Epstein wrote a book called, '*Going to pieces without falling apart.*' I would like to rephrase it like this - *feeling emptiness without having an anxiety about entering the void.*

In order to find a balance between our two very different worlds and, in fact, if we are to find any kind of balance between any kind of polarity, we need both connection and what Alex calls availability. I call it, *quality and curiosity*. Others might call it, *action and awareness*. It doesn't matter what we call it as long as we are alerting our awareness to the connections we are making between our different worlds.

I still need to get Alex to accept the notion of balance between our two worlds.

ALEX

I agree with everything Stefan says, but I can't think about these things any longer. I mentioned at the beginning that I find it difficult to live by the conditions that most people seems to adhere to. I can't sustain these discussions. I am like a fish out of water. I just want to swim off now and flow through my element. When I have calmed down, I will return to myself as a huge stone and live in quiet stoniness. I will just sit and wait. And when I have rested there, I will become a man again. This time I will be watchful, like a man crossing a winter stream and alert, like a man aware of danger. I don't want to return to the same debate, it will bring me down. I can still be courteous though, like a visiting guest. I can be yielding, like ice about to melt; simple, like a block of wood not yet carved. I can be hollow, like a cave and opaque like a muddy pool. I can wait quietly and watch the mud settle. I can remain still until the moment for action comes. I can't be seeking fulfilment or direct myself towards change. I want to empty myself of everything and let my mind become still. Then I will start to compose another song. This is the only way I can keep my mind open. With an open mind, I can be openhearted. Being openhearted is the finest way to start a poem.

I like art that begins this way and I don't want to enumerate its virtues when its finished. This is how Stefan and many others talk about art. These are the words he gave me. *"If I understand correctly, you believe an art*

object succeeds if it evokes in the viewer feelings similar to those that the artist intended.” No, no, no. There is no reason to be stuck on thoughts about what the artist intended. I was quoting John Berger who was talking about the moment when an artist decides the painting is finished; when it finally comes out of the unknown. This is what he says. “The long or short process of painting a picture is the process of constructing such a moment. Of course, the painting’s moment-of-being-looked-at can’t be entirely foreseen.” This thinking has nothing to do with notions about what the artist intended.

Stefan wants to improve my relationship with everyone around me and I don’t want to do this. I have tried all my life to get on with people and unless we naturally get on the effort goes nowhere. It is time for me to give up on all this kind of activity. I rather prefer being left alone.

STEFAN

I was very impressed with Alex's thoughts about songs. I feel that what he was describing is what I call quality. A listener can feel the soul expressed by a singer when singing their song and when people sing or listen together the feelings that arise are what I call a mood.

An analyst asks an Indian guru:

What's the secret of eternal happiness?

The guru answers: Not to argue with a fool!

The analyst says: I disagree, arguing can be important, depending on the context and unconscious motivation.

The guru answers: Yes, you are right.

The words I should have given Alex today is, "Yes, you are right". He got angry about my questions concerning art and even more angry about me analyzing what he says.

I should not have attempted to argue with him. There was nothing I could say that he was prepared to discuss, let alone agree with.

We are no longer in the therapeutic field. We are hardly ever operating in this context. My task now must be to clarify the situation; to see if Alex can get a glimpse of the unconscious parts of ambiguity or the role his mixed feelings play in his life. We are both going the wrong way. We should discover what the hidden conflict is or what role

the hidden emotions play. These are the components that create the inner polarity and give rise to the inner tensions.

Instead of discussing controversial topics and fighting over different points of view, we should now look for negotiation and compromise. We have created an external polarity; there is a big field of tension between us.

I must try to tease out Alex's internal tensions and ambivalent feelings. He came here because he needs help to sort out the conflicts that cause tension in him. Now we have this tension between us. He probably feels better if this tension is inhabiting the space between us rather than he having to deal with it inside himself alone. I should live with this. I do not know if he carries this tension with him when he returns home. If he goes back to the lonely place he inhabits when we end our talks, then our talks are based on his resistance rather than therapy. In this case, I am colluding with him rather than helping him move on.

I do not know how to get our relationship back on the therapy trail, but we are at least on the trail of sharing the tensions and feeling the polarity. This is interesting and it makes me increasingly curious.

I am working on a poem for Alex:

*YES, I know it is not therapy
it never was with Alex
but what is it, if it is not therapy*

ALEX

I didn't want to talk about therapy and Stefan's agenda today, so I talked about art; something I had written about during the week. The artists I prefer never intend. They search by walking in the dark, just feeling connection and trying to give their medium some form, so they can look at it and contemplate its possible resonance. They don't know anything about it. They just float it out into the world and call by to see it now to then to gain a sense of how it feels. They experiment without intention or recognizable knowledge. They have to work this way, or they won't have the raw material they need to dream with. They want to dream this way. They can't use those things that have already been digested.

Stefan's world is concerned with digestion and analysis. It is not his job to know anything about the artistic world. If he is open to it and feels connection with it well and good, but he should not feel that he has any responsibility for it. He cannot clarify anything about it. The poem or the painting is somewhere far from analysis and an analyst will never get hold of it using the therapeutic method. They are a different set of tools for proceeding and they should enjoy the qualities they possess. Artists need raw products that can be used for intention. They want a clean sheet. There is nothing others can say about their work. All we can talk about is how artists go about their experiments.

This lack of access to art drives the public mad. They

CHAPTER TWENTY

can't believe there is not more to be known or talked about. They want some power in this arena – all to no avail. This is the power of art and poetry. Non-artists can't have an automatic purchase on art just because they want to prove they're connected to some higher purpose. There is no higher purpose – it is a mistake to go looking for it. It only arises out of the actions we undertake. Non-artists should never approach art with the conscious intention of wanting to pigeon hole it. It will allude them. Just as the Tao or the Zen spirit alludes those who are not ready.

There isn't even a consensus about art among artists and poets. National museums and private galleries alike try to pretend they have some kind of purchase on what's good or not, but there is far too much bull-shit bandied about and the public believe it. It's up to every individual to decide where the art is. It's up to every individual to decide what their particular brand of sanity is. It's up to every individual to decide how they would like to die. It's a big business, this life and death stuff. Don't trust what the artist's say. Don't imagine it's a vague, expansive, cultural activity for Sunday afternoons. Either do the action or don't do it. Some people have no choice. They have to do it to survive.

STEFAN

Today, Alex stared out of the window and lectured me on how he sees art and how the audience should position themselves in relation to the artist. I think he must have written all this down previously, because it sounded well practised. Oddly enough, he seemed absent and I felt like an anonymous student. It was very interesting and I learned many new things. The most revealing part for me was that I should not try to interpret or analyse art or the artist, and I should not approach art with an intention. I agree with both of these points and I think the same rule should apply to analysis and the analyst. Do not approach therapy with an intention and if you are there, accept the responsibility for the setting and the task that's planned.

Interesting, now that I write these words, I realise that this is what's missing in my work with Alex, I have lost responsibility for the setting and for the task. After all the sessions we've had, I still do not know, or maybe even worse I forget, why Alex came and what the task is.

Alex delivers a lecture. I'm interested and I learn a lot of interesting things, but we have completely lost the focus of why Alex came to see me. As an analyst, I have lost my task. As a student I have become more and more interested. I have made a shift in my role; I am becoming someone I was not at the beginning.

I never returned to my theme of real-life relationships with Alex. I never got him to talk about his father and his childhood. I never managed to touch his vulnerability or his anger; he has always tried to be in control of himself and the proceedings. This is all as Alex wishes it to be. The big mystery is why he has no power in the world, either domestically or the world at large, when he exercise such power and determination in the therapy room.

Here are a few observations.

When Alex is scared, he fights back, but he has no power.

When he is dominated, he fights back, but he has no power.

If there is no threat to him, he recedes into the mist.

ALEX

“There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it.”

‘Composition as Explanation’ by Gertrude Stein.

This is the opening paragraph. Gertrude Stein inspired cubism. This piece of writing is about the way in which composition has become the predominant issue by the time we arrive at the twentieth century. Composition is at the start of the art process and it is the only explanation we can give for it. This piece of writing was delivered as a lecture at Cambridge and Oxford in 1926.

Composition. Decisions about composition are the only explanation possible. Composition is the reason why artists work. No meaning. Just playing around with structures in an open way to see what happens; to see how much space they can make; to enjoy the rhythms. And if we like the experiment, we give a shout. And if we don't like this particular experiment, we keep looking. It's everyone's own particular journey.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Enough now. I can't talk any more about poetry and art. It must be sufficient for me to say I know nothing. This is the only place to start. When I try to speak everything alludes me. If my personal impression of a work is not well received, then I accept the beauty of silence. Why must everyone have some kind of purchase on this material? It has become a middle-class obsession for individuals to give the impression that they can put their finger on art. Even those who truly love it start with not knowing. There is no other position. Either we enjoy it because it has an energy we connect with or we don't enjoy it. Who cares? Saying something about it isn't any kind of verification.

I am determined to shift my conversation with Stefan. The straight jacket he wants me to wear has been too tight for me. If an author is writing a book, they might ask themselves how they intend to keep their audience. If they are creating a narrow alleyway of possibilities, no-one will read it. Similarly, if the therapeutic session is a journey down a narrow alleyway, who is going to stay there? We must free up the game and see where we get to. I want Stefan to take a chance, take a leap and see where it leads us. We don't even have to make sense.

STEFAN

Alex was again staring into the distance today. He wanted to make therapy as interesting as writing a successful novel. This is how an author keeps their audience and he wants everything to proceed like art. He thinks we are writing a book. Am I just part of an art object in Alex's mind? Is this therapy session a performance? I have lost the overview. I don't think I will find a way to solve Alex's problem. I cannot expect to fulfill my given task. It is difficult to define what therapy is and it is even more difficult to define what good therapy is. When I think of this with Alex in mind, I lose my answer to this question. The experienced analyst in me has gone far away. I am feeling like a beginner.

Some can't undertake analysis. There is not much help we can give them. Those with a well-developed defense system, will not allow anything to come near them.

This situation reminds me of a previous client. She had earlier experienced a problem with her father and had learned to accept the ordeals. She re-established her life, but later she came to see me about a problem with her husband. When I asked her to talk about her mother, she became angry. She told me she had no problem with her mother; they are best friends. I learned that she stayed with her mother every weekend and they even went on holiday together.

I asked if it was possible that her relationship with her mother could be the basis of her problem with her husband. She said that her husband was always complaining, and this is the reason for her problem. She was upset that I continued to explore this line of thought and declared that she would have to stop the therapy, if I didn't desist. She claimed that I was on her husband's side.

This is the "narcissistic armament". I focused on what seemed to be the underlying problem and she went away without tackling the task. I was left with a feeling of impotence, because I couldn't solve the task.

I talked with my supervisor about it. He explained that sometimes a patient makes the therapist experience exactly the situation they are going through, making them feel the feeling the patient is experiencing. This is an unconscious act. My female client was incapable of engaging with the task of detaching herself from her mother, so she put me in the situation where I was incapable of solving my task of helping her in this process. We were both entangled and incompetent, and I couldn't help her resolve her issues. It is a very risky job.

Am I experiencing this with Alex? If so, when did I hit his most vulnerable place? I do not know. I feel I've lost the trail. He puts a vast amount of energy into making me feel something and I am not sure what it is. I have the vague feeling that I am dissolving into insignificance. If he wants this, what emotions does he want to trigger in me? I will ask him this question. It is risky, but I have no choice.

ALEX

You says she agrees, but he can't think. He finds it in him to live and he adheres to it. You sustain, you swim, and you flow. You are calm and you return, quiet. I sit and wait. You rest, watchful and alert. You don't want to return to bring it down. They hope, courteous and yielding, simple yet carved, hollow and opaque, waiting and watching. She is still seeking and changing. I am empty and still. You compose. I am open. It is the start.

Who begins? Who enumerates? Are they finished? Is this how we talk and give? Does he understand or believe he succeeds? She evokes what's intended. Were you quoting or talking? Can you decide? Is he finished. This is what he says. He processes it and constructs it. He is being looked at; foreseen.

I will give you mine. I prefer intended. They search, go walking, just feeling and trying to give. Can she look and contemplate? They don't know. They just float. They call it and see it. They sense how it is feeling with intention and recognize it. They work to dream. They want to dream. They want to digest it.

You're concerned, I'm digesting and analyzing. Don't get upset if you don't appear to know about it. How could she? If you are open and feel it, be responsible and clarify it. We will never get hold of it. You have developed. He is different. She proceeds and they enjoy them. We need it to be used for intention. They want to clean it. There is

nothing you can say. We can talk about how and go on if we experiment.

We lack it, but we have access and drive. They're mad. They can't believe it. Did they talk about it? They want to. You can't have it and prove you're connected. You can't approach it, have intentions of wanting it. It will allude you if you're not ready. Is there a consensus? Don't try to pretend and don't purchase too much. Nobody wants to bandy about belief. It is up us. We decide. They decide. Am I vague?

Here is the beginning, inspired by arriving when she started. She is lecturing us. *"There is nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and ending. We are all different at looking. I know it is different and they like being different. We are different if you are alike. We know it and they say it."*

She gave an explanation. Did you reason it? No meaning. Just playing. Can you see it? Can they see how you enjoy it? If you like it, shout. If you don't like it, keep looking. It's your journey.

Can we talk? It's fine. Say nothing. This is my start; my try, but does it allude us or do we receive it and accept it? She was silent. He was purchasing me. Was he obsessed? I give it to them and they put it where we all start. They enjoy it. You energise it. She connects it. We say it when we verify it and they verify it.

I will shift and converse with them. Who is tight? Who asks? Who is going and living? She is free. That's where we get to. Take a chance. Take a leap. See it. Do you sense it?

STEFAN

“...in contrast to modernity - it's no longer about overall designs and big stories, but about a patchwork of independent and loosely connected fragments.”

Tony Brühlmann, 2013

In postmodern times, such as ours, we should practice integration and think of it as the post integrative approach. It is NOT necessary to find integration for everything because sometimes it is not possible. Alex and I can't share a point of view and we must leave it this way.

Francois Jollien, a French philosopher, claims that there is no such thing as cultural identity. Understanding each other across cultures doesn't mean we must take each other's point of view and record the differences; it means we must recognise that we stand between two cultures. We must step away from the self-evident homeland and realise, in the struggle for common humanity, that there is not as much security and clarity as we imagined before the confrontation started.

It feels right in these times that we give generous hearted integration a place in our world. I have to accept that we

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

cannot complete this task. We will never integrate our different points of view. I have to leave it here. I have to accept failure. I feel fragmented. I must be thankful for the interesting talks. I must try not to be disappointed about not fulfilling the needs of my client. I feel he came with a requirement, something he wanted me to experience. I wonder what his wife actually said to him. Was he really under pressure to produce a certificate to prove he is healthy? Why is he not capable of showing her that he is in good mental health, that his way of living is for him the best way? I am not skilled enough to demonstrate that I am capable of helping him. I am disappearing out of therapy, just as he is disappearing out of social connections. There is no integration possible. We have to leave it as a fragmented picture, a patchwork of conflicting dreams and dramas. Good talks interesting ideas. Many things learnt, but no therapy. No improvement. No task fulfilled.

I am still working on my poem for Alex:

No intension, no result.

This might be pure art.

ALEX

The more we take away the more the observer wants to find out what is in there. Everyone finds absence intriguing. I have taken even more away today, using an erasing strategy for my subtraction. The point is we all choose what to select and how much we want of that thing. It's one of our big decisions and it uses all our senses to achieve it. This is what our personal aesthetic is. It's what you like and what I like when we like something. Given that 27% of the universe's matter is invisible to us and 68% of its energy is invisible, this reduction in what we present is, in a way, a truth of some kind, because we don't know more than this. So, we should go on with this supposition in mind. Stefan's clients are making a choice about what to select and how much of that thing they want to make visible. Stefan is also making a choice about what to select and how much he wants to make visible of that thing. It's a miracle that anyone connects at all, but we do, and we do it with our whole being, including our bones. Gradually disappearing.

Stefan says he agrees, but he can't think. He finds it in him to live and he adheres to it. You sustain, you swim, and you flow. You are calm and you return, quiet. I sit and wait. You rest, watchful and alert. You don't want to return to bring it down. They hope, courteous and yielding, simple yet carved, hollow and opaque, waiting and watching. She is still seeking and changing. I am empty and still. You compose. I am open. It's a start.

Who begins? Who enumerates? Are they finished? Is this how we talk and give? Does he understand or believe he succeeds? She evokes what's intended. Were you quoting or talking? Can you decide? Is he finished. This is what he says. He processes it and constructs it. He is being looked at; foreseen.

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I will shift and converse with them. Who is tight? Who asks? Who is going and living? She is free. That's where we get to. Take a chance. Take a leap. See it. Do you sense it?

STEFAN

I love the disappearing pages Alex gave me. I gaze at them and imagine it is a conversation between two people. Each has their own blurred ability to talk and each has their own blurred ability to listen. The mouth and the ear both have blurred possibilities, making the transmission of the content very unstable! The interpretation and the speaking are obviously influenced by the unconscious, which we only read in a blurred fashion. It seems to represent a reality that is not easily expressed.

As we were parting today, I asked if he would tell me next time whether it is true that he wants to trigger emotions. He stared up to the ceiling. Was it for inspiration or was it to be granted the gift of forbearance in his dealings with me?

ALEX

Today I read this poem to Stefan.

The Human side of Nature

John Ashbery and Jonas Salk both said
There's nothing specific for us to do;
Our wisdom arrives by necessity.
Some growing is crucial, but this we do
Inherently, just by evolution;
We can simply submit to acceptance,
Learn how to anticipate the future,
Track the rhythms of growth and submit to
Inclinations that dance fandango for
Well-being and flamenco for the cells.

We can hear through bones, as well as the ears,
And the spellbinding, multi-layered tales
Told by old shamans cultivate benign
Instincts for our future's broadmindedness.
When frequent blunders become more acute
It is time to start swinging from the heart.
As new loves are born, there is no need to
Immunize against the negative swoon,
The old way of judging is out, it was
Never kind to flowers or buoyancy.

Having experienced the infection,
Shun old paths and the acceptance of fear,
We'll easily recognise the pattern
Of lethargy when connections increase.
Keep open, keep scanning, grow a thin skin,
Have a bird's eye view and a worm's eye view,
Elbow out the dominance of cash flow,
We've no need to carry investors.
Merge with the creative neutral misfits
Who practice positive simplicity.

Discontent expresses the driving force,
But constant interference is the norm;
Let the next evolution process be
Upon us, in us, with us and through us.
Make affection the newfound bravery,
Multiply magnanimous attention,
Send reasoning to the intuition's
Department, observe the new unfolding,
Assist what's unsupported and learn how
To breeze with time at perception HQ.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Attend wholeheartedly to unlearning,
Start giving evolution a purpose.
We're ripe for falling steadily into
Ourselves, making each new day a life-span.
Anticipate the future; it's fine now
To stumble upon self-consciousness.
We had wisdom, without too much knowledge,
Then we developed fear, replaced benign
Casualness with scary risk forecasts and
Stopped the good old carefree buzz from humming.

If we have no wisdom to govern the
Knowledge, let the custard pies be our guide,
They will aid the inception of slapstick.
We have the right genes for this and they will
Activate fast when people are ready;
This affirms the collective certainty
That each of us has a different purpose.
Anything is only worth the candle
If you make frisky hearts the starting point,
And celebrations of beauty the norm.

STEFAN

I am very impressed by the poem Alex read to me

From session to session I lose control more and more. My relevance as an analyst, the meanings I try to touch upon, the observations that might possibly carry significance, they all melt like snow in the sun. A client usually comes to therapy to look in the therapeutic mirror; this usually helps them see what is going on. The mirror shows them what they already know and helps them to see the parts they are neglecting or denying/covering up. The shadow of the personality should become visible so that the client can become more aware of themselves. It should help them answer the question: “who am I”. It should help them to make a bigger and more precise picture.

Our therapeutic relationship doesn't work. Alex has not changed a bit. He has not accepted anything. He looked in the mirror, saw nothing and stayed the way he was. I was the mirror and I changed. I became insecure and lost my ability to contain the process. I have begun to accept that I am good at creating the right setting for change, but with Alex, this ability has vanished. What is happening? I do not understand. There is nothing I can do. I have to give up my job. I must let this thing fall apart, otherwise I will go to pieces and dissolve.

ALEX

There is a very simple answer to Stefan's question about triggering emotions. It is NO. Why should I want to trigger emotions? I don't use the word emotion in this way; it makes it sound like the artist is squeezing some fruit to get at the juice. For me the most important thing is the pleasure one finds in making a connection.

I like to make poems and I like to think about making gardens. When making a book, I need a structure, so I talk to the words, the sentences and the pages and invite them to become my friends. I love having these kind of friends. If I were making a garden, I would talk to the rocks, trees and flowers and invite them to become my friends. In all my activity I want to try to follow nature.

If I am sitting in a fine landscape or looking at islands out at sea, I could have any number of emotions depending upon how I am feeling, but what is most important is that I feel alive, in this very minute and it is magical. I want my poems to carry this sense of being in the world, but only one in ten million persons will connect with my poem in this way. That's all.

STEFAN

This is my poem for Alex.

*“In the landscape of Spring
there is neither better nor worse;
The flowering branches grow naturally,
some long, some short.”*

Allan Watts: “Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen.”

I want to tell Alex that psychotherapy, like art, is also concerned with awareness and mindfulness. It has a spiritual dimension, though it is not a traditional path to self-knowledge. It assumes that if we are aware of the relatedness of all things, then the Self can be placed in a bigger field of cause and effect. The aim is to help us lose our notions of self-importance. Therapy, mixed with awareness and mindfulness techniques, can help patients become calm and experience a better connection between their mind, emotions and body; it is a tool for emphasising the acceptance of the Self as it presents itself here and now.

ALEX

I typed out this text for Stefan and read it to him.

I know corries in Argyle that whisper silken to the winds with juicy grasses, corries where the deer love to prance deep in the cool dew, and the beasts of far-off woods come in bands at their seasons and together rejoice. I have seen the hunter in them and the shepherd too, coarse men in life and occupation, come sudden among the blowing rush and whispering reed, among the bog-flower and the cannoch, unheeding the moor-hen and the cailzie-cock rising, or the stag of ten at pause, while they stood, passionate adventurers in a rapture of the mind, held as it were by the spirit of such places as they lay in a sloeberry bloom of haze, the spirit of old good songs, the baffling surmise of the piper and the bard. To those corries of my native place will be coming in the yellow moon of brock and fougart – the beasts that dote on the autumn eves – the People of Quietness; have I not seen their lanthorns and heard their laughter in the night? – so that they must be blessed corries, so endowed since the days when the gods dwelt in them without tartan and spear in the years of the peace that had no beginning.

From *John Splendid* - a novel by Neil Munro; 1899

This is beauty. This is quality. Slowly Dissolving

STEFAN

Today Alex simply stopped talking. He read a very beautiful text from a nineteenth century novel. But I do not know what he is trying to tell me.

I was thinking about our session while out walking. I passed by a poster of a play outside a theatre. It was “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. It occurs to me that my therapy sessions with Alex are similar to this story. The protagonist comes to be mirrored, he does not change, but the mirror does.

*I am the picture;
Alex is Dorian Gray.*

ALEX

Today Stefan talked to me about clients coming to him to be mirrored. I don't understand, yet again. Does he really think that if I am mirrored it will start a process of change? Yes, I believe he does, but how can I understand this? This is therapy theory. I have no reference for it. At the end of the talk, he said something about me not changing, but the mirror changing, and then he said I was Dorian Gray and he was the picture. I just do not understand why.

I looked up the story to refresh myself. Lord Henry Wotton convinces the young Dorian Gray that the only important thing in life is beauty. Dorian realizes that he will become less beautiful as he grows older, so he dreams of the portrait Basil painted of him becoming old in his place. Then Dorian, by accident it seems, sells his soul so that he can be beautiful forever. So if I'm Dorian Gray, I've sold my soul and Stefan is a painting in which the person being portrayed looks gradually older. He has taken it upon himself to do my aging, while I grieve about being young.

When Dorian is old, he regrets the misdemeanours of his life and attempts to destroy the painting. There is a crash, and his servants enter to find the portrait, unharmed. It now portrays Dorian Gray as a beautiful young man, but on the floor lies the body of Dorian, now an old man, horribly wrinkled and disfigured, with a knife plunged into his heart. This is not me.

STEFAN

Today I talked to Alex about a client's need to feel mirrored and the danger that occurs when a client adopts a position of denial and resistance. He did not take to my theme. He spent the time looking puzzled in a very theatrical way.

Tonight, I am looking at myself in a mirror and I see an analyst who can't let things go the way they want to go. Why am I so greedy? Why do I want Alex to experience realisations? Is it to help him out of suffering, or am I just desperately trying to avoid suffering myself? Do I want to pull him out of emptiness, or am I desperately trying to prevent myself from going there? I have to let him off the hook. I will accept that I did not do my job. I should not go on solely because I am afraid of not succeeding. This is the wrong motivation. It is not about my Ego it is about Alex wanting to be helped.

I made too much effort. My motivation was wrong. To stop means to respect the "Wei Wu Wei". No action contrary to nature, that is how Alex expressed it.

I realise that something might be wrong with me more than something might be wrong with Alex. I am getting very tired and my head is heavy. I see old memories in my head, old, painful memories. I let my awareness go towards these internal pictures. I start remembering situa.....

I will describe the pictures that filled my head.

As a child, I tried to rescue my mother from her void, but she closed the doors on me. She was fully armoured against change, yet she tried to make me feel guilty if I did not succeed in soothing her. I had no chance of success, but I did not give up. I was afraid of being pulled into the void, frightened of disappearing into the swamp of her narcissistic depression. I remember so well how hard the little boy tried without succeeding.

At that time, I was depending on living in a fully functioning home, but now I am not dependent on Alex, only my Ego. I could not accept that he was more my teacher than I was his analyst. Now I can see how I fit in to this situation. I should let him go and accept his way of dealing with his life. This I can do because I realise that I have my own defences, my own quota of denial. It is not unlike his and maybe it is more than his.

I was not conscious about what happened until now and worse than this, I blamed my condition on him. I feel ashamed of my attempt at analysing; undervaluing and misusing my skills to make him out to be something he is not. Maybe he just came to see me with a series of rather unexceptional questions about his domestic arrangements. This is not what I wanted. I needed a client who has a dramatic realisation so that I could be the hero, the rescuer. I wanted to compensate the one who had failed to be the hero as a boy.

Now that I see my analytical process in this context, I feel ashamed. I am confused and now I think it is possible that he was the mirror and I was Dorian Gray. But I will

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

not need a knife to end my sorrow. The knife in the novel could be a metaphor for self-pity; a way of avoiding shame. Shame is an ice cube. We can melt it with mourning or we can melt it with humour.

I realise that I am making a lecture out of this situation, and maybe this too is part of my avoidance, but it is my way – the way I live and the way I expand and develop.

In the next session I will tell Alex that we can stop the therapy. After a brake, maybe we could meet in private like we did years ago.

I am living with the blues today.
Only mourning can tame
My feeling of emptiness.
I must remember to name
And accept what I painfully miss.

ALEX

Since my last session, I carefully wrote out my predicament and gave it to Stefan to read today. It explains everything.

When I was in my late thirties, I partially realised the importance of what happened to me as an infant. I was completely unaware of it at the time and I have never had any memories of it. I have rarely mentioned it to anyone, other than stating the fact of the physical event. I never talked about my interpretation of what probably went on in my head. Maybe I didn't trust anyone with my version because it sounds far too dramatic. I don't want to dramatize myself. When I was in my sixties, I told it to a friend who also had a trauma in infancy. He said that he felt relief at hearing my story. There's a bond in sharing stories. Now I am in my seventies, I have written it out and I am giving it to you to read. I think it will be useful. Don't ask me why I never told you before. You never asked about it because you accepted my limp, just as I accept it. It rarely crosses my mind, so I don't bring it out as an issue into the daylight. I hope you believe me when I say, I concealed it inadvertently. My apologies anyway; it would have saved you considerable time and effort.

Before he is one year old, the infant in this story travels with his parents to an undeveloped foreign land where his father has been given employment. When this infant is two

years old, he develops a high fever, headaches, stiffness in his back and neck and some weakness in his muscles. He becomes highly sensitive to touch and has difficulty swallowing. He experiences muscle pain, a loss of reflexes, pins and needles, irritability, constipation and great difficulty in urinating. He is taken to hospital where he exhibits fever, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pains, followed by an influenza-like illness. He feels lethargic and irritable. No-one know that the virus will progress to a paralytic disease, where his muscles become weak and floppy. No-one know that he will not be able to control his muscles and he will become partially paralysed.

The virus has hijacked his cell's and has begun to replicate. It divides within gastrointestinal cells for about a week, from where it spreads to the tonsils, intestinal lymphoid tissue and then to his deep cervical and mesenteric lymph nodes, where it multiplies abundantly. The virus is then absorbed into his bloodstream, where it is widely distributed throughout his body. It survives and multiplies continually within his blood and lymphatic system for a number of weeks. This sustained replication leads to further influenza-like symptoms and finally to the denervation of his skeletal muscle tissue, which leads to his paralysis.

The motor neurons in our grey matter are responsible for movement of the muscles. With the destruction of this infant's nerve cells, his muscles no longer receive signals from the brain or spinal cord. Without nerve stimulation, his muscles become weaker and weaker. He loses any form of control and atrophy sets in. This paralysis progresses

rapidly and involves fever and muscle pain. Deep tendon reflexes soon become absent. In his case, it only paralyzes the upper part of his right leg. With this virus, paralysis is more severe where the limb joins the body. He is incapable of operating any part of his right leg.

He was an active two-year-old. He has learned how to walk and talk and play with small objects. He is in that stage of his life when learning is prolific, when action and talk is crucial to development. This is when strategies are created. This is when our lessons become significant, when they get cemented in. This is when we lay down our primary processes, our working methodologies. He must engage in the primary stage of his foundation building at a stage when he is in complete isolation. He must work out how to develop a creative life by himself.

This condition lasts for three months. No mother and no father. Nurses, some of whom speak English, appear sporadically. Hours on end staring at the walls and ceiling. It is bright and hot, but because the shutters are closed, it is semi-dark and hot. He learns to point at the shutters to get a nurse to open them. He adamantly stays awake during the day so that he can see the walls and ceiling. They are white, but they contain a few cracks. Cracks are life. They change with the light. He can't go to them. If he attempts to move, he crashes to the floor, bruising himself.

He needs a strategy for keeping himself growing. What can he do? He learns how to read the cracks in the walls. He reads the whole world there. He learns all his lessons there, develops all his creative moves there. He establishes all of his primary processes for stimulation and reaction

there. It is a busy time. Hours go by slowly, yet there is never an idle moment. This crack looks like this. That crack looks like that. Put them together, multiply them and it means this and that. Stories are learned and told in the cracks. This is all there is. Silent games, silent stories. He knows he must never waste a thing. No matter how sparse it is, it's the start of riches. Trust the cracks. You can't trust parents or people. They don't help with the learning. He doesn't even recognise them anymore.

He has a fight on his hands. He must learn how to survive. He starts to test all that he has learned so far. He must develop his learning and put it to good use. He never has any feelings about needing accolades for surviving. He accepts that this is his test and he rises to the challenge as though it's all simply par for the course. This is his daily life; keeping busy with life. It becomes a template for the way he will always keep busy in life.

Before this trauma, he had learned how to sing, so he continues to sing. He had rhymes in his head and rhythms in his body. These things his mother had taught him. When she is allowed to visit him for the first time, three months after the virus began, he doesn't recognise her, but her melodies have never left him. His life is full of repetitive games, additive and subtractive games, rhythms played out with inconsistency and with continuous continuity.

At times he loses the cracks, or they change their meaning by altering their scale. A face looks this way and then that, as his interpretation of the profile changes. He is metaphorically in an arid desert, because stimulation is so minimal, and he is physically in an arid desert because this

is where they have located the isolation hospital. There are no sounds of life from outside. In later life, continuous sounds, like that of a radio playing in the background, is anathema to him. Too much stimulation causes him instant overload and confusion.

People provide him with nothing. This journey is between him and the cosmos. The connections that he makes are with the invisible energies that resonate through time and space. He had only left this celestial-like state two years ago, and now, reconnecting with it, he feels close to those innocent days he spent in the womb. At times he feels an urgent call to move forwards, to move out into life, to escape the unbearable claustrophobia that starts the challenge to live, but mostly he waits patiently in the state of limbo that characterises pre-birth. This is the place where he lays his foundations, the building blocks of his consciousness. This is the water he swims in.

His mental agility survives because he can hear a palm tree taking in water through its roots and he can sense the mechanisms that operate during osmosis. He accepts that the ceiling and the walls have imagination, that the inside surface communicates with the outside surface. That different things make contact around him is very welcome. He lives in this room without even the sound of an animal or a bird.

He can tell stories, but they are all in his head. He can't practice speaking them. He doesn't have the language and no-one would understand them even if such a great number of words were his to use.

I will place him in time. Suppose that a three-month

period of life is regarded as a single developmental phase. He has lived eight of these phases when the virus starts. Eight stages of gradually developing responses to outer stimuli. He is in the ninth phase and now he must return to the time he spent during pre-birth. This is a stage of reflection and reconsideration, a place that offers him the chance to balance inside and outside. Day and night, he meditates on this place of silence without physical action.

Then he starts to relive his first eight phases of life. He is surprised again, just as he was in phase one. He is in a place where feeding occurs simply because he happens to open his mouth. He watches his fingers move and enjoys their dance as he had done in phase two. He feels and flexes his muscles as he had done in phase three. Going over the old ground and marvelling again at the beauty of the simple magic. He learns again what is required of his tongue and larynx in order to make sounds, what is required of his body to activate his limbs. What his arms and hands could achieve; holding and lifting small objects. This is slow and painstaking development, but it brings him satisfaction.

It won't be until the fourteenth phase that he will be outside again, being encouraged to learn how to take his own weight on his legs. It will take him many phases of development before he succeeds at this momentous task.

After six months in care, he leaves the hospital. He's a happy, friendly boy, but he inhabits the world in a slightly different way to the way other children do. He is four years old when he recognises that he is beginning to become re-acclimatised to the life that others lead, but he still returns

to the cracks in walls and ceilings, the shapes in wooden furniture and the folds and patterns in curtains.

He assumes that in the end, this is all there is. He never ever wastes a thing. No matter how sparse his possibilities, he knows it is the start of riches. He realises that his way is not everyone's way, that he has a very particular methodology, but he learns how to make it fit in without his way being scrutinised and questioned.

He soon accepts that if he is to survive in the 'real' world, he has to adapt, he has to alter his strategies, but he is smart enough to find the line of least resistance. He keeps his important creative moves intact. He learns how to operate in normal society with his primary processes of stimulation and reaction fully intact. He knows that all adaptation is a secondary phenomenon. Home is where his processes work best because, in this place, this is all there is. This is where the silent games and the silent stories really work; this is what they were built for.

He only realises all of this as years go by. He rarely gives voice to it; assuming that everyone works in this or a similar manner. As an old man, he doesn't have to adapt as much as he did as a working man. He begins to feel more himself again and becomes more silent and withdrawn. The place of simple white walls is his home; it is the place where his strategies thrive and where he can always learn something new. He must always learn something new.

He never forgets how to go there and in old age he is happy to return there for longer stretches of time. He isn't unhappy. He doesn't lose his ability to co-ordinate the many functions that twenty-first century life requires, but

he doesn't require too much stimulation. He enjoys making a connection to the invisible energies and dreaming the dance of material components.

To be able to deliver simple rhymes and rhythms in a sonorous tone is already a feast for him. He doesn't ask for so much and in return he doesn't want to be asked for too much. He has no idea what the basic minimum standard is and he is bemused that his way might be seen by others as unacceptable behaviour. Three steps forward and one and a half steps back. Three steps forward and one and a half steps back. This is a good rhythm. It has balance and it offers the possibility of hearing things that would otherwise get lost in the always new. There is great sanity here. Who would want to try and teach him a different sanity in his seventies? People who enjoy life smile at him and say good morning and he returns the compliments. Just that. No more is needed for a dance.

But others around him are keen to label his way of living. They start to call it anti-social. This confuses him. It is simply time for him to go home, to that place where all his learning was done, to the place he trusts, the place where his unconscious memories are most important. It's time for him to return more often to that archetypal world, which is connected to all things, where little of importance is specific. He is at peace there. Why would anyone consider it right to try to lead him away from it? For what purpose? We all have the right to go home.

STEFAN

*There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in*

Leonard Cohen

Today Alex gave me a text to read about his infancy. It is like a miracle, the eighth wonder of the world. I told Alex that I am now ready to accept his desire to stop therapy. I explained to him, that being with him brought up a strong memory about my childhood and I realised that I was possibly engaging in this treatment for myself more than I was doing it for him.

Our story began with a synchronous event and now it seems to end with one. The text Alex gave me to read was, what he described as his predicament. He told me a story that must have been very painful for him. He put it in words and now it can become his salvation. He went to the heart of his suffering, which in my terminology means he entered the void. For the first time since we met, he seemed to be connected to both himself and to me. I could feel his sorrow and his grief. The grief which we feel when we have consciously buried lost years in our childhood. There is a very big difference between avoiding our memories and embracing them. Therapy is about remembering, it is about accepting and letting go. Remembering the trauma, accepting the damage that has been done, and then getting on with the possible life options we have.

This is as good as it gets.

So, what did we do? Did we reach the goal and finish the task? I still don't know, but it doesn't bother me so much now. I am not indifferent, but in-different, meaning that describing the resolution makes no difference. The unconscious suffering was named and now a new life can begin; a life based on accepting and not avoiding. We will go on lecturing, teaching, avoiding, denying, but hopefully with less effort. "Wei Wu Wei"!

Today Alex and I have a rebirth, for Alex it might be a third time!

I have finished my poem for Alex:

No intension, effortless action.

This is pure art.

Is this good enough for therapy?

What is therapy if not this?

