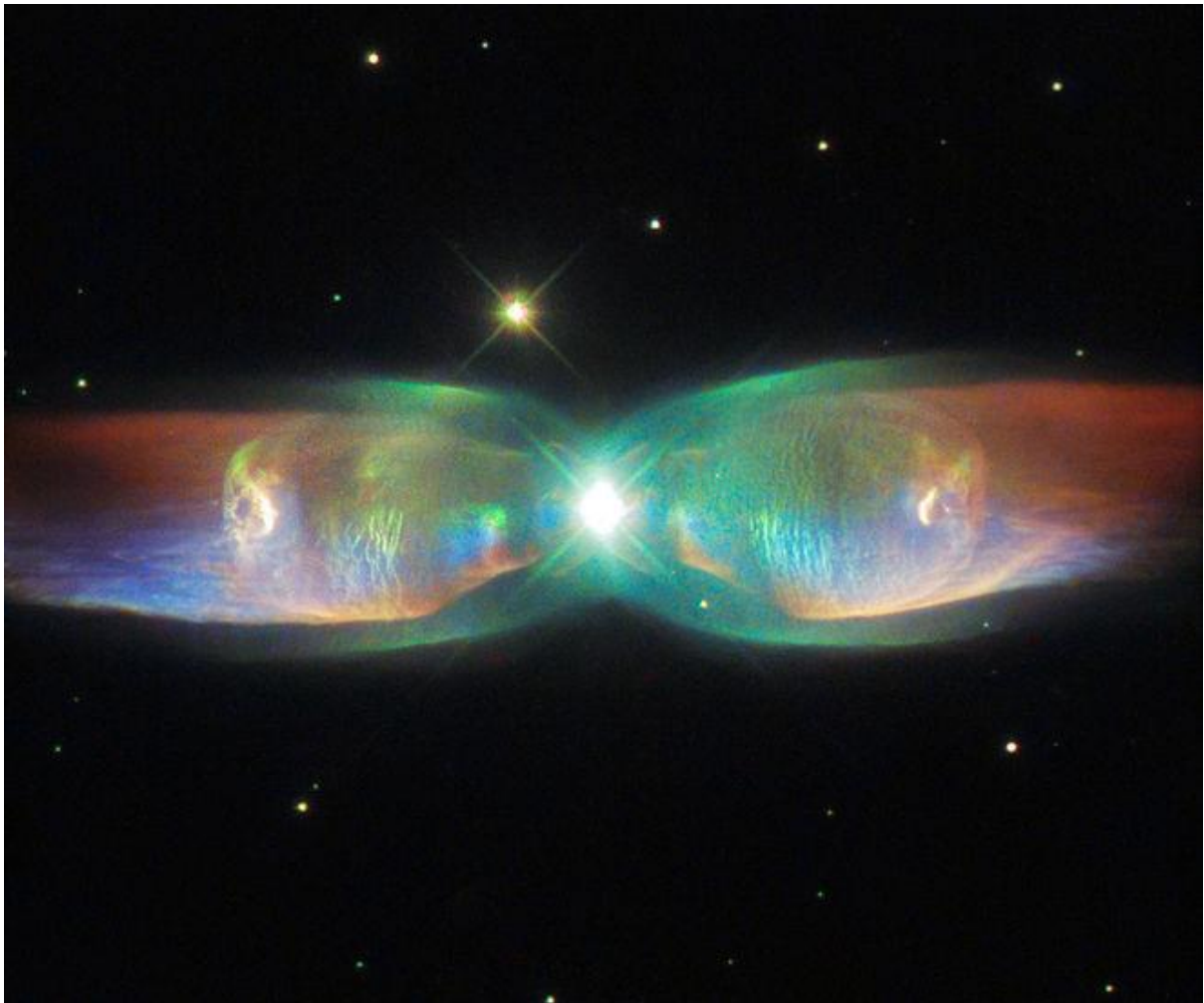


**Being Opened:  
A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Enquiry into the  
Existential Psychotherapist's Lived Experience of Wonder**

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# Abstract

This research is the first to explore the lived experience of psychotherapist wonder. The primary aim was to provide a rich, evocative description of wonder together with an understanding of its meaning and the conditions for its emergence as a phenomenon in a clinical context. Eight existential, phenomenologically orientated psychotherapists and counselling psychologists participated in the study.

To generate sufficiently rich lived experience descriptions the methodological approach of Max van Manen's (2014) *Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Practice* was used. Two methods of data collection were applied with each participant: a written description of a concrete experience of clinical and an unstructured phenomenological interview. Max Van Manen's thematic approach was the main method of analysing the emergent data. During this analysis, Corinne Glesne's method of *Poetic Transcription* was also used in response to the emerging poetic quality of the participants' experiences.

Three interconnected overarching themes were identified. The first theme highlights the experience of wonder as a state of openness in which the therapist dwells in unknowing. The second theme details the embodied, deeply relational dimension of wonder: of therapist opening to and being opened into an experience of full presence with their client. The third theme focuses on how wonder is a profoundly renewing experience: a birthing place for new knowledge and therapeutic discovery.

Discussion of these findings suggests their therapeutic and theoretical implications, extending existing literature on practices of wonder. The relevance of Hannah Arendt's natal ontology is made to the emergent themes of this study, widening the attention of existential psychotherapy beyond the thoroughly theorized topic of anxiety in the fear of death to describe the awakening and hopeful possibilities of wonder-attuned practice. This study provides compelling descriptions of the ethical dimensions of wonder which generate deep mutual connection within the therapeutic relationship resonant of Martin Buber's I-Thou relating, Emmanuel Levinas's Alterity of the Other and Luce Irigaray's Maternal Philosophy of Breath.

**Keywords:** Wonder; Existential Psychotherapy; Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Practice; van Manen; Poetic Transcription; Buber; Levinas; Arendt; Irigaray; Natality; Philosophy of Breath.

# Statement of Authorship

This dissertation is written by Paula Seth and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted to both these institutions in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctorate of Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling by Professional Studies (DProf). The author is solely responsible for the content and writing of the dissertation.

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# Participant Code

Participant 1 – John [J]

Participant 2 – Andreas [A]

Participant 3 – Mia [M]

Participant 4 – Jason [JA]

Participant 5 – Ruben [R]

Participant 6 – Tony [T]

Participant 7 – Dave [D]

Participant 8 – Nicholas [N]

Quotations from participants are identified by the letter code for their name and the number(s) given refer to the location of the quotation in the interview transcript. For example, [N/87]. Numbers preceded by [LED] refer to quotations taken from the written lived experience descriptions. For example, [N/LED.7].

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring is dimmed and lost even before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy... I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength. (Carson, 1956, pp. 42-43)

A day comes when, thanks to rigidity, nothing causes wonder any more, everything is known, and life is spent in beginning over again. These are the days of exile, of desiccated life, of dead souls. (Camus, 1955, p.141)

## 1.0 Introduction

My life has been enriched by experiences of wonder: my first night alone with my new-born son; quiet moments in nature: a Himalayan forest, the northern lights, a deer coming into a clearing of the woods where I live; standing in front of a Rothko painting and falling into the colour. Even during the most mundane moments, out of the familiar texture of lived experience, something can reveal itself as if for the first time. In these moments, it is as if the world has called me, and hearing it, I am drawn into a new intimate relationship, pregnant with possibilities, meaning and significance. In this mood of wonder I stand still in astonishment at the emerging presence of something new and intensely powerful. In my earlier professional life as a drama teacher I was fascinated by the wonder of children and the power of theatre to evoke wonder in an audience. As a psychotherapist, I am often wonder-struck by the human capacity to find meaning amidst suffering. The gift from Carson's good fairy seems to have so far lasted a lifetime and I have avoided becoming exiled with Camus' "dead souls".

## 1 The Research Question

The invocation to wonder, as a phenomenologically orientated therapist, started the process whereby wonder became something to wonder about rather than simply experience. When the urge of the question: "What *is* it like to wonder?" grew into a demand I began to feel what Sela-Smith (2002, p.70) has described as "free-fall surrender". In this surrender, Moustakas (1990, p.28) suggests "everything in his or her life becomes crystallized around the question". Romanyshyn (2007, p.137) similarly argues that there comes a point where the researcher makes an active choice to enter the "transference field between oneself and the work with the sense that one no longer knows what the work is about. Indeed the transference space is created through this act of humble submission". The research question in effect creates a "space of possibility" to which the researcher willingly submits. Falling into a state of intense wondering, I have become increasingly aware of the presence of the wonderful. At times it felt as if wonder had found me rather than me finding wonder.

In his essay *Gateways to Wonder*, Irish philosopher and poet John O' Donoghue (Donoghue and Quinn, 2015, p.21) observes that "a question really is one of the forms in which wonder expresses itself". Whereas I have placed wonder centre stage in this study, it is of course at the heart of all research. The question which has best expressed the wondering of this particular research, which has become the phenomenal fulcrum around which my life has organised itself these past years, is: **"What is the existential-phenomenological psychotherapist's lived experience of wonder when it emerges in the context of the therapeutic encounter with her/his client?"**

The primary aim of this study has been to describe what it is like for existentially-orientated psychotherapists to experience wonder in their clinical work. Emerging out of this aim has been the intention to describe the contexts or situations which typically influence or affect these experiences of wonder.

In the first part of this research narrative I present a review of literature relevant to the study of wonder as a phenomenon in a psychotherapeutic context. I then provide an account of the methodological approach I have used, a description of the findings from my eight participants' experiences, followed by a discussion of how these outcomes relate to and extend the existing research and thinking about wonder in clinical practice. I conclude with a reflexive account of the process, a description of the significance of the study, and recommendations for future wondering in psychotherapy.

# CHAPTER TWO: WONDROUS LITERATURE

## 2.0 Introduction

The etymology of wonder is appropriately ambiguous. From Latinate roots in *mirari* –which means wonder, we derive the word miracle – “anything wonderful, beyond human power, a deviating from the common action of nature, a supernatural event” (Parsons, 1969, p.84). Another suggestion is that wonder has its stem in the Greek word *daimon* which as well as meaning a sense of wonder, also has connotations of strangeness, fear or dread (Bollert, 2010 p.4). There is also a possible ancestry between wonder and the old English *wundor* linked to the German *wunde* or *wound* (Brown, 2014; Burton, 2015; Parsons, 1969; Rubenstein, 2008), which is particularly appropriate if we understand wonder as a sudden opening in the “membrane of awareness” (Parsons, 1969, p.85), when our established systems of meaning are ruptured and we are facing into the unknown. Our habituated way of seeing/sensing our world is disturbed and the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. In this moment there is some similarity to awe or the sublime but it is suggested (Bulkeley, 2005; Fuller, 2006; Schneider, 2009) that in wonder the moment is caught before it drops into the terror associated with these other emotions. Pearce and Maclure perhaps offer a definition that brings these different dimensions into focus when they describe wonder as: “a liminal experience- a sort of shimmering apprehension on the threshold between knowing and unknowing, in which aesthetic, cognitive, and spiritual experiences are simultaneously mobilized.” (2009, p.254)

Our understanding of wonder is shaped by the cultural context in which it is experienced and described. As many in the literature have argued (Bulkeley, 2005; Bynum, 1997; Daston and Park, 1998; Dawkins, 2000; Fuller, 2006; Fisher, 1998; Greenblatt, 2001; Heidegger, 1995; Hepburn, 1980; Holmes, 2008; Parsons, 1969; Rubenstein, 2011; Sallis, 1995; Tallis, 2012; Vasalou, 2012) the history of wonder in the West is the history of humanity’s encounter with and sense-making of the universe. Parsons (1969), adopting a more anthropological approach to understanding wonder, suggests that in pre-history, wonder was directed towards sources of the natural world. Towards the end of the Palaeolithic period, however, when humans became more organised into settled communities, “specific spiritual beings began to emerge presiding over specific areas and functions of society” (p.193). In other words, gods were born becoming the source of wonder. As civilisations developed, wonder towards nature and the supernatural merged with the effects of god-like priests and kings: their pyramids, temples, ritual ceremonies and pageants.

Parson (1969) argues further that, in these ancient times, as humans developed skills, wonder was still directed towards: “things and events taken to be beyond men’s ken and control” (p.195). It was in the age of Greek civilisation, however, that a profound shift took place. While still moved by the wonders of nature, the Early Greeks were also stirred by the wonder of human ingenuity, technological achievements and their ability not simply to imitate nature, but to transform it. This changed focus is captured most precisely by Sophocles (1984, p. 540) in *Antigone*:

Wonders are many, and none more wonderful than man. This being goes with the storm-wind across the foamy sea, moving deep amid cavernous waves. And the oldest of the gods, Earth the immortal, the untiring, he wears away, turning the soil with the brood of horses, as year after year the ploughs move to and fro.

Moving beyond wonder as the response to the miraculous, contemporary literature describes the Greek concept of wonder as paradigm-changing. What the Greeks brought to consciousness was not simply wonder at human potential, but also the fact of our capacity to ask questions of our being-in-the-world. In wonder, the Greeks, it is argued (Elkholy, 2012; Heidegger, 1995; Heidegger, Macquarie and Robinson, 2000; Held, 2005; Hepburn, 1980; Llewellyn, 2001; Nightingale, 2001; Rosselli, 2012; Rubenstein, 2008) made meta-thinking possible. In wonder we are able to think about thinking.

Despite scholarly discussion and the assertion of wonder’s significance in the fundamental process of scientific enquiry and the shaping of humanity’s encounter with meaning making, there has been relatively little empirical research into the phenomenon of wonder itself. It somehow defies definition, which is perhaps why, in spite of its significance in religious, philosophical and aesthetic discourses, wonder remains the most under-researched of human emotions (Burton, 2015; Frijda, 1986; Keltner and Haidt, 2003; Lazarus, 1991; Plutchik, 2000; Strongman, 2003). Where it has been the focus of study, Vasalou (2012, p.27) argues it “emerges as an emotion unlike others in almost every way, and one calculated to fall through the cracks of taxonomies”. In recent years, however, wonder has emerged as a “hot topic” (Bynum, 1997, p.2) of personal, political philosophical and clinical significance (Brown, 2014; Bulkeley, 2005; Evans, 2012; Fuller, 2006; Nussbaum, 2001; Vasalou, 2012) and there is now a growing body of contemporary writings exploring the phenomenon.

A review of philosophical literature suggests that the fundamental mood of wonder in existential thought and practice has been neglected due to Heidegger’s emphasis on Angst (Arendt, 1978; Hansen, 2012; Held, 2005; Staehler, 2007; Ricoueur, 2006). Given that existential psychotherapy draws on and applies ideas from existential philosophy, I suggest that the consequence of such one-sidedness is that the significance of wonder for psychotherapy has not been sufficiently addressed. Wonder is described as the fundamental phenomenological attitude of the existential psychotherapist when relating to clients (Finlay, 2011; Hycner, 1993; Schneider, 2004, 2009, 2015; van Deurzen, 1999; Yalom, 2011). Yet a review of the literature reveals that there are scant empirical studies of wonder as a phenomenon in general and only one other unpublished study which considers the potential significance of the lived experience of wonder in a psychotherapeutic setting (Hycner, 1976). There has been no research which explicitly studies what it is for the existential-phenomenological therapist to actually be in an “attitude of wonder” in a clinical encounter, and what the conditions might

be whereby this apparently important attitude is experienced. This study is designed to address this gap in the knowledge-base of existential- phenomenological psychotherapy.

## 2.1 Review Objectives and Parameters

The languages, practices, actions, identities and understandings that make up the descriptions of the phenomenon of wonder in particular contexts – in my case a psychotherapeutic one – are in part shaped and made possible by philosophical understandings which are culturally and historically specific. Understanding these discursive limits has, I suggest, implications both for existential therapists who ground their practice in wonder as a fundamental attitude and those phenomenological researchers for whom wonder is a methodological approach.

In their analysis of different literature review methods, Greenhough and Peacock (2005) argue that researchers should not rely solely on protocol-driven searches, but should incorporate other approaches such as following references of references, electronic citation tracking and informal approaches like “as browsing and ‘asking around’” (p.1065). My own search approach was multi-method. In order to develop an understanding of the intellectual history of the phenomenon, an initial search was conducted by looking for wonder in philosophical writings. My intention in this chapter is to provide an indicative rather than a comprehensive review of the philosophical literature of wonder, as to achieve the latter would be a project in itself. Given the centrality of wondering as a philosophical mode of enquiry, my first searches were in the philosophical databases PhilPapers and The Philosopher’s Index. I explored the academic journals listed by Taylor and Francis and Routledge and Wiley, as well as sourcing material from the online catalogues of philosophy publishing houses. Given the significance of wonder to philosophy, and the frequent use of “to wonder” to describe the scholar’s process, my initial searches were restricted to articles and books in which the word *wonder* appeared in titles and abstracts.

Time spent reading this body of literature was followed by a further review of literature in the references of these texts. This initial search of philosophical literature also disclosed works in education, psychology, psychotherapy, medicine, theology, and the arts that had wonder as their focus of study. Tightening my focus on psychotherapy, I followed up any relevant references which had emerged from this first, philosophical wave of enquiry and conducted specific searches with the words *wonder*, *psychotherapy* and *psychology* in “Summon” on Middlesex University’s webpage, and Google Scholar. Following the review method advocated by Randolph (2009), I searched all the references until I found that no new references of significance were emerging and the literature was referring back to sources I had already discovered. A number of articles were passed to me serendipitously by colleagues who had heard of my research. At this point, I felt I had reached a point of sufficient saturation in understanding.

As the phenomenon of wonder has been a topic of interest through history and across disciplinary fields, my search process disclosed a range of different types of writing on wonder which not only resist direct comparison but invite different critical review approaches. In terms of organising this review, I have grouped the literature into three main categories for analysis and synthesis. In the first category, my initial focus of attention was to gain an understanding of the status and debates within the philosophical literature of wonder as a phenomenon of human lived experience, and how this experience has changed in nature or function over time. Given that my study is an enquiry into the experience of wonder in an area of human practice, the second section of this review critically engages with the scholarly articles that explore the nature and function of wonder in applied contexts. Of particular relevance to my study are the few texts which offered a psychological/psychotherapeutic perspective of wonder. These are reviewed in greater depth than other categories. A small body of qualitative studies on wonder were disclosed. I consider these texts in the third section of this review.

## 2.2 An Intellectual History of Wonder

A sense of wonder started men philosophizing, in ancient times as well as today. Their wondering is aroused, first, by trivial matters; but they continue on from there to wonder about less mundane matters such as the changes of the moon, sun, and stars, and the beginnings of the universe. What is the result of this puzzlement? An awesome feeling of ignorance. Men began to philosophize, therefore, to escape ignorance. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 2, cited in Christian, 1986, p.35)

That our thinking finds it so toilsome to be in this bestowal, or even on the lookout for it, cannot be blamed on the narrowness of contemporary intellect or resistance to unsettling or disruptive news. Rather we may surmise something else: that we know too much and believe too readily ever to feel at home in a questioning which is powerfully experienced. For that we need the ability to wonder at what is simple, and to take up that wonder as our abode. (Heidegger, 1975 pp.103-104)

Since the time of the Early Greeks, wonder has played a central, albeit at times, ambivalent position in Western philosophical discourse. One recurrent theme in the literature is the manner in which wonder has sometimes been celebrated by philosophers as the prelude to divine contemplation and motivator of investigation, whilst in other eras being rejected as the shaming admission of ignorance or cowardly flight into fear of the unknown (Bynum, 1997; Daston and Park, 1998; Greenblatt, 1991; Holmes, 2008; Kaulingfreks, Spoelstra and ten Bo2, 2011; Sherry, 2012). What emerges is an understanding of wonder as a phenomenon whose function, value and definition have been fluid over time.

Searching for “wonder” through the key writings of influential Western philosophers, it emerges that, to varying degrees, there is always a space of contemplation with regard to how it figures in relation to their understanding of human existence. It is beyond the limits of this review to address in detail how wonder has shaped the thinking of key philosophers, but in response to this fact of philosophers’ wonder there exists a recent body of secondary literature which offers such critical engagement: Plato (Bollert, 2010), Descartes (Brown, 2006; Garrett, 2009); Hobbes (Barker, 2015; Deckard, 2008);

Kant (Wiseman, 2006); Wittgenstein (Bearn, 1997); Husserl (Kingwell, 2000); Heidegger (Held, 2005; Rubenstein, 2008; Staehler, 2007; Stone, 2006) Levinas (Roesch-Marsh, 2003); Arendt (Hansen, 2012; Held, 2005); and Irigaray (Jones, 2011; La Caze, 2002; Williams, 2004).

Finally, there is an emerging group of scholars who argue that wonder is not simply a topic of philosophical interest. They maintain that it is of vital educational, sociological, psychological and geopolitical significance that we understand wonder as a human experience today (Bulkeley, 2005; Egan, Cant and Judson, 2014; Fuller, 2005; Hansen, 2012; Nussbaum; 2001; Schneider, 2009). I locate this particular study of wonder within this growing field of scholarly interest.

In arguing for the relevance of this study, I make the assertion that wonder is an important yet under-examined phenomenon in existential-phenomenological psychotherapy. All forms of psychotherapy look towards philosophy for validation of their work, although these forms are sometimes less transparent than in existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, which is explicit about the body of philosophy it draws upon for its methods and underlying principles (Cooper, 2015; van Deurzen, 1997, 1999). Given that wonder is one of the key methods and principles of existential-phenomenological philosophy, developing an understanding of the intellectual history of wonder seems an important first step in appreciating its discursive limits in particular times and spaces.

Considering my focus on existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, where I do engage with particular philosophers in later sections, these are generally located within the existential-phenomenological tradition. A space of dialogue between Eastern philosophico-religious thinking, existential philosophy (Balslev, 2010; Boss, 1965, Caputo, 1978; Hirsch, 1970, Ma, 2008 and psychotherapeutic practice (Nanda, 2009; Schneider, 2015) has opened in recent decades. I therefore refer in this review to accounts of wonder in Vedic, Tantric and Buddhist philosophies.

In an attempt to come to a fuller understanding of the intellectual history of wonder in Western and Eastern traditions, I have identified four key questions which I will use to structure my review of the philosophical literature:

- What are the objects of wonder in philosophy?
- How is wonder conceptualised/categorised in the philosophical literature?
- What is the function of wonder in philosophy?
- How has the experience of wonder been described?

### **2.2.1 Objects of Wonder**

Wonder is a sudden surprise of the soul which makes it tend to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary. (Descartes, 1986 p.56)

There are, it appears, no certainties regarding the objects of wonder. Initially, the proper object was the divine expressed through forces of nature and the miracles that seemed to ensue from a realm



beyond human knowledge. Within Indian philosophical and religious traditions, for example, the great epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana are replete with examples of wonderment (*camatkara*) at the exploits of the gods and demons and miracles of the saints (Hulin, 2012). Within Western thought since the Early Greeks, wonder has been drawn into the mortal domain, being described as an appropriate response to the human condition (Buber, 2013; Lévinas, 1969) ingenuity (Hobbes, 1998; Hume, Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, 1978) and language (Wittgenstein, 2014). Wonder, the literature suggests, is the “appreciative response” (Vasalou, 2012, p. 3) of the extra-ordinary. But wonder is also the way the most ordinary can reveal itself. It has been argued that Heidegger’s philosophy was, in fact, “one last grand and necessarily vain effort” to return to a way of being which dwells in, transforming the ordinary “into something extraordinary that might elicit our wonder. That beings are, no matter how normal they may be, is what is wondrous” (Kaulingfreks, Spoelstra and ten Bos, 2011, p. 314).

Many commentators understand wonder as an invitation to perceive an object better in itself: wonder un-conceals the very thingness or thus-ness of the object. Verhoeven perhaps captures this moment most clearly:

What actually happens now in wonder at this concrete thing? In the first place I understand the thing. I see it assembling before my eyes out of a fan of possibilities, I see it congeal out of the liquidity of those possibilities and condense to form a separate identity. (Verhoeven, 1972 p.78)

At the most ontological level, Heidegger’s (2000) object of wonder is Being – that something is rather than isn’t. Whereas Descartes argued that it is our attention to the “rare and extraordinary” which evokes wonder as a compelling source of enquiry, he also maintained that wonder initiates its own demise as we seek to answer the mystery it generates. The psychologist Dufrenne (1973) locates his description of aesthetic wonder at the moment when Descartes’ surprise is awakened and before his association of wonder with the unknown leads to it being decried as ignorance. Orientating himself to the object phenomenologically, Dufrenne suggests that on perceiving something which surprises us, “we are unfaithful to the object to the extent that we remain insensitive to its ‘outlaw’ quality and claim to tame it with explanation and reintegrate it within the universe of our habits” (p.409). Likening an attitude of wonder to the attitude of love, Dufrenne, like Marion (1996), argues that we should stay with the object’s surplus of meaning and resist the impulse to perceive it “as a problem to solve or an anomaly to diagnose ... its strangeness the result of a comparison with a model with which it must be contrasted” (Dufrenne, 1973, p.410).

Within Indian philosophical thinking, the study of wonder or *camatkara* is rooted in aesthetics, most famously in the writings of tenth-century Kashmiri metaphysician, poet and tantric master Abhinvagupta. Pointing to his descriptions of wonder as aesthetic rapture, commentators (Biernacki, 2015, Hulin, 2012; Lima, 2010) have observed how Abhinvagupta, offers a non-dualistic understanding that prefigures phenomenological perspectives of the twentieth century: that the self as embedded within the world is revealed through wonder. The observer of an object of wonder is not simply overtaken with a passive astonishment, but is moved to profound self-reflection: “Our mind,

carried away by wondering (*camatkatra*) takes for a couple of days the very form of its own self and sees the whole world through it.” (Abhinavagupta, cited in Hulin, 2012, p.228). Biernacki (2015, p.16) suggests that within Eastern traditions, *camatkatra* promotes this non-dual awareness by acting as a bridge between self-transcendence and embodied materiality: “The logic of wonder as numinous container of self and world in a rapture of awareness that leaves behind the mind’s tendency to dichotomize into self and others.” *Camatkara*, Hulin suggests: “is the natural state of the soul” (2012, p.229) and its proper object is its own content. To wonder in this sense is to engage in a constant process of self-reflection in order to resist being trapped in thought. Whilst Eastern traditions may not accord wonder the status of philosophy’s beginning, wonder has a central role within the contemplative practice, which is at the heart of Tantra and especially Buddhist psychology.

### 2.2.2 Types of Wonder

Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomèd mine—  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person’d Lamia melt into a shade. (Keats, *Lamia*, 1999, p.193)

Many times over the course of this project I have been at a loss regarding how I might conceptualise wonder: is it a passion, an emotion, a feeling, a mood, an attitude or an ontological “event” (Hansen, 2012, p.14)? Part of this confusion is undoubtedly rooted in the fact that in different periods in history wonder has been variously described as all of these. Yet few commentators reflect on how the category of wonder they use carries its own significance. In his study, *Vehement Passions* Fisher (2002, p.7) argues clearly that these categories are not interchangeable terms, but “are profoundly different configurations” with “overlapping but strongly differing accounts of what might count as a typical, a central, or an excluded inner state”.

For the early Greeks, wonder was one of the passions of the soul which described human nature: “Impassioned states are not experienced as events occurring to the self, which would be experienced beneath or above them. Instead, the self arises in the passion, takes form in it.” (Lingis, 2012, p.221) The passions (*pathê*) formed a typology of ancient psychology and were understood as internal potentialities to be activated by external experiences. Once stirred, they generated a sense of agency by delineating the will and motivating movement. In this context, wonder is the passion which, once stirred, provokes the movement of the intellect, leading the individual to find meaning, while still staying open to the mysteries of being. Socrates declared that Iris – the rainbow goddess and messenger of the heavens – is the child of wonder. Since then, the rainbow has become paradigmatic in describing this passionate aspect of wonder throughout literature (Keats, 1999; Dawkins, 2000;

Holmes, 2008; Fisher, 1998). When confronted by the appearance of the rainbow, the observer, whose sense of wonder is evoked, is prompted to seek a rational explanation for the physical reality of what is seen, while simultaneously being aware that such explanation can never dispel the initial experience of the enigma. This concept of the passions as internal states which, once awoken, affect individual judgement and actions, led the Stoic philosophers to argue that their disturbing influence must be quelled with reason.

By the time of the Enlightenment, the language of passions had been largely replaced by the language of emotions, and loosened from their pathological connotations of diseased states needing to be controlled. Wonder continues to provoke enquiry, but after Kant (1993, p.169) it is also connected to the formation of an inner moral code: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." Both the external senses and the internal self are to be examined by reason according to appropriate methods.

In his *Sketch of a Theory of Emotions* (2001), Sartre displaces prior understandings of passions, feelings and emotions. Paying critical attention to the formulation of emotion as a disruption from the Freudian Id, Sartre offers instead an existential psychological perspective. Reconfiguring emotions away from prior passive conceptualisation, as things which are evoked by experiences that happen to us, he sees emotions as things that we do. Radically, Sartre argues that every emotion: "sets up a magical world by using the body as a means of incantation" (p.70). Emotions effect a change in the quality and experience of the world, which is thus transformed. Whereas there are criticisms from a neurological perspective (Solomon, 2006, p.103) of this theory of the emotions as inherently volitional, what is of relevance to this study is Sartre's argument that wonder does not fit into his emergent theory: "This theory of emotions does not explain the immediate reactions of horror and wonder that sometimes possess us when certain objects suddenly appear to us" (Sartre, 2001, p. 84). In the case of horror and wonder, Sartre resorts to a traditional, passive conceptualisation of an emotion that seizes us.

Sartre's theory of emotions arguably draws on Heidegger's theory of world-disclosing moods. Unlike the passive, outside role allocated to wonder in Sartre's work, in Heidegger's theory of moods wonder has a central place. Moods – wonder included – Heidegger maintained, are integral to his phenomenology of being-in-the-world. It is through mood that the world is disclosed to Dasein: "We are never free of moods ... A state-of-mind always has its understanding ... understanding always has its mood" (Heidegger, 2000, p.182).

Heidegger divides moods into two categories: "everyday" and "fundamental". Everyday moods such as fear, terror and horror function on the ontic level, revealing, he claims, how Dasein "fares with respect to its factual situatedness in the open range of possibilities" (Held, 2005, p.288). In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger, (Heidegger, M., Rojcewicz, R. and Vallega-Neu, D., 2012) describes three fundamental, ontological moods: Wonder, Boredom and Angst, which having no

definite object, open Dasein to determining the world as a whole. It is hard, however, for Dasein to be in the open-most possibility of existence which fundamental moods reveal, so Dasein conceals fundamental moods from itself by, for example, angst falling to fear or, as Heidegger also claims, wonder falling to curiosity, amazement, and astonishment.

Reviewing the changing ways wonder has been categorised in the philosophical literature reveals it as a phenomenon subject to the construction of culture and historical moment. Each term generates a distinct template for understanding.

### 2.2.3 Functions of Wonder

It is not we who break through to the unknown. It is the unknown which breaks through to us, ignites in us the eros of the desire to know, and so transforms us into questioners. (Miller, 1992, p.4)

Reviewing the literature, it becomes clear that wonder serves the primary function within Western philosophical traditions of allowing us to engage with the unknown and move towards new ideation, new knowledge, and new ways of relating to the other. As Parsons (1969, p.90) describes: “Wondering arises and swells into being at the point where surprise- emotion is impregnated with a question and quest for signification.”

One of the most oft-cited examples of this aspect of wonder is Plato’s description of Socrates meeting with Theaetetus. Here the teacher reveals that even though knowledge is presumed in any philosophical enquiry, what knowledge actually *is* continues to elude him. Inviting Theaetetus to offer his reflection on what knowledge might be, Socrates proceeds to dismantle each idea as a “wind egg”. In the face of having the insubstantiality of each of his ideas revealed to him, the young student is suddenly struck with wonder:

Theaetetus: Yes indeed, by the gods Socrates I wonder exceedingly as to why (what) in the world these things are, and sometimes in looking at them I truly get dizzy.

Socrates: The reason is, my dear, that apparently, Theodorus’ guess about your nature is not a bad one, for this experience is very much a philosopher’s, that of wondering. For nothing else is the beginning of philosophy than this. (Plato, 1986, p.155)

As Rubeinstein (2008, p.4) points out, it is the: “sudden insubstantiality of something he had held to be self-evident” that throws Theaetetus into a state of wonder. In its creating an impulse for man to think through the limits of knowledge, wonder is thus said to be the beginning of philosophy:

Wonder ... grounds philosophy by resonating the two-fold structure of its response to the mystery of the world. It causes our fascination and captivation with the world to resonate while concomitantly responding to a fundamental discontent vis-a-vis what escapes explanation. (Kenaan and Ferber, 2011, p.7)

In generating new ideas, wonder has a creative function which has been recognised as being of central importance by commentators in the arts, science and education (Dawkins, 2000; Dufrenne, 1973; Egan, Cant and Judson, 2014). This creative aspect has also been the focus of philosophers and commentators, who see wonder as offering a “spark of life” (Ricœur, 2004, p.357) within the struggle of human existence. This transformative, “creative force of wonder” (Hansen, 2010), which has the potential to draw us away from an ego-centric orientation and hear the “Call of the Thou” in dialogical human relationships, is a theme which emerges throughout the literature (Buber, 2013; Lévinas, 1969, 1998; Hansen, 2009, 2012; Irigaray, 1993, 2013; Roesch-Marsh, 2003). Wonderment in this sense has a profoundly ethical function. Using as her point of departure Descartes’ understanding of wonder as the emotion without equal, Irigaray in particular (1993) has figured wonder in an ethical sense, inspiring in turn, a body of writings on feminist ethics (Chanter, 1995; La Caze, 2002; Rawlinson, Hom and Khader, 2011).

#### 2.2.4 Lived Experience Descriptions of Wonder

And so each new venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate. (Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 2001, p.54)

I went up to the flight deck to see the view, and wow, it was incredible. The first sensation of looking out of the window was very disorienting. Everything seemed to be floating – me, the shuttle, and the earth, and all in different orientations. (Gallagher *et al.*, 2015, p.31)

Struggling one night to synthesise the literature for this section of my review, my breath was suddenly taken by a stunning dawn which climbed up from behind the Tipperary mountains in the distance and lit the lake outside my window. Whilst my impulse was to describe the magical spectacle before me, I knew my words would invariably miss the essence of this moment of wonder that only the Irish poets of the landscape seem to capture. This moment, however, reminded me of Kierkegaard’s observation that: “The subjective thinker is not a scientist – he is an artist. To exist is an art.” (Cited and translated by Hansen, 2009, p.199). Wonder, perhaps, is best expressed when language is infused with the poetic.

Taking on Romanyshyn’s (2007) mantle of “failed poet”, my focus in this project is to come close to and describe the lived experience of wonder in a psychotherapeutic context. While many Western philosophers throughout history have placed wonder as an important, if not necessary object of enquiry, there have been few who have attempted to *describe* what it is to experience wonder *from* his or her lived experience. Hansen (2009, p.198) describes how Kierkegaard upheld Socrates as such an existing thinker: “It is one thing to understand and another to be. Socrates is so elevated that he does away with this distinction.” Others have similarly recalled the Early Greeks as the ones who could exist in wonder rather than merely understand wonder’s object, function and effect (Arendt, 1971; Heidegger, 1975 Nietzsche, 1996). In his introduction to philosophy, Verhoeven (1972) develops this discourse of lack in philosophical accounts of wonder, arguing that its “basic structure” is not a

thing which can be “set out for display and then mastered. It has to be aroused” (p.13). The failure of philosophers to give “any sign of wonder” in their work he attributes to the “risky” nature of such an undertaking: that the philosopher – if he did arouse wonder – might not be accepted, or “called the dupe of a danger that is also inherent in wonder.” (p.31) Rather than simply trying to understand and categorise wonder, as Heidegger most notably did in *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (1995), Verhoeven, attempts to also engender wonder in the reader by describing, for example, the experience of perception:

The dark patch of its concreteness stands out in a clear void of imagined possibilities. In the second place, I see the thing shifting into its context where it takes up its place. At that place it is confirmed in its identity. But that place is its very mobility within the framework. In that mobility the thing explodes again in its possibilities. (Verhoeven, 1972, p.78)

Verhoeven reveals and reflects upon what he regards as the two “permanent and substantial” elements of the phenomenon of wonder in the act of philosophising: “openness and crisis” (1972, p.29). Openness is in both the pathic sense of vulnerability and receptivity, but also in the sense of it being a fissure in the closed circuit of prior understanding. Wonder, in his view, is a crisis in that the wondering person is forced to review his or her existence and plunge – with all inherent risks, dangers and suffering – into a world no longer governed by self-interest.

Figuring wonder as experience which transcends self-limits, describing the lived experience of wonder, tends to fall to those philosophers whose thinking brings them close to the mystical, such as in Buber’s (2013) writing of the I-Thou, Lévinas’ (1969) wonder at the face of the Other, and Wittgenstein’s early wondering at the existence of the world:

[O]ur words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense ... our words will only express facts, as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water [even] if I were to pour out a gallon over it. (Wittgenstein, 2014, p.7)

In offering this metaphor of the overflowing teacup, Wittgenstein tries to capture something of the overpowering presence of noumenal experiences. When Descartes describes the human gaze looking towards God – he speaks of it as an experience in which an “immense light” descends on the uncertain, obscured eye of his darkened intellect. He can only “bear” so much. Like Wittgenstein’s teacup, he is unable to contain it all. For Marion (1996), a sense of wonder is this paradigmatic response to the surplus of saturated phenomenon:

His phenomenology leads the thinking subject beyond the self-certain gaze that seeks to determine and ultimately exhaust its objects through the proximity of knowledge that determines in advance the horizon of possible experience. (Wiseman, 2006, p.169)

Wonder here traces back to the miraculous – of the sudden revelation of the mysterious and sacred together with its central qualities of passivity and receptivity. Wonder thus lends itself to a spiritual attitude, and as a phenomenon it is been given passionate expression in accounts of religious rapture (Otto and Harvey, 1958; Teresa and Cohen, 1957). Within traditions which invoke a ‘theology of wonder’ (Sigrist, 2001), the utilitarianism of the wonderer is momentarily held in abeyance and a

sense of being connected with something bigger is foregrounded. In this sense wonder acts as “a bridge to transcendence” (Nava, 2013, p.16).

My study involves an investigation into the *inner* space of experiencing wonder, and so what is fascinating is that some of the most vividly expressed contemporary descriptions of the phenomenon have emerged from the “star logs” of those who travel in *outer* space. In their recent interdisciplinary study, Gallagher *et al.* (2015) analysed the flight logs, in-space journals and post-flight interviews of astronauts who have described experiences of awe and wonder when they encountered the earth from space (a thing of wonder). Their accounts of connectedness, unity, love, peace, joy describe an experience as passionately felt as the mystics. Their sense of the ineffability of wonder is conveyed through their struggle to find the language to express their experience. I describe the study of these experiences more fully in a later section of this chapter.

## **2.3 Wonder in Practice**

The focus of my research is a study of wonder within existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, an area of practice in which there has been limited critical attention. My intention in this section is to review the small body of literature that has been written on this topic, together with other literature which has taken themes and ideas from a philosophical discourse on wonder and applied them to psychology and medicine more generally.

### **2.3.1 Psychotherapy and Counselling Literature**

Existential-phenomenological psychotherapy has been likened to phenomenological research undertaken by therapist and client into the various dimensions of the client’s life-world. The aim is to explore the client’s situatedness, revealing in the process their problems, paradoxes and dilemmas in living (Spinelli 2007; van Deurzen and Adams, 2011). Rather than trying to deny their own subjectivity or standpoint, existential-phenomenological therapists are aware of how the preconceptions and assumptions which form the fore-structure of their own understanding becomes an integral part of their encounter with the client’s narrative of lived experience. It is of central importance therefore that in order to see the client more clearly, the therapists becomes fully attentive to their own situatedness through a process called *epoché*, which literally means the suspension of our judgements.

*Epoché* is a process of reduction, whereby the fore-structures which influence the therapist’s perception of their client’s experience are brought into consciousness and put into metaphorical brackets. These assumptions are then addressed before returning to awareness (van Deurzen and Adams 2011, p.43). In his explanation of *epoché*, in phenomenological research, van Manen argues that wonder is integral to this process:

At the most basic level the phenomenological reduction consists of the attitude or mood of wonder ... What does this mean? It implies an approach that can shatter the taken for grantedness of our everyday reality. Wonder is the unwilling willingness to meet what is utterly strange in what is most familiar. It is the willingness to step back and let things speak to us, a passive receptivity to let the things of the world present themselves in their own time. (van Manen, 2011, p.223)

Evoking this sense of wonder as reduction, the existential psychotherapist Yalom (2011) states: "I have approached all of my patients with a sense of wonderment at the story that will unfold." In a similar way, van Deurzen (1999) claims wonder to be the exemplary therapist attitude: "There has to be complete openness to the individual situation and an attitude of wonder that will allow the specific circumstances and experiences to unfold in their own right" (p.218). Wonder is here more than "openness" to the client as other. It is the mood or attitude which has the effect of bracketing off the therapists own pre-conceptions and enables the uniqueness of the individual's lived experience to be revealed. In this psychotherapeutic literature, there is the implication that wonder has a significant part to play in the potential of the therapeutic dyad to create a new narrative and potentially new meanings of existence and ways of being. Watkins and Wang (2016, p.178) foreground the wonder of psychotherapy when they argue that psychotherapy education is: "designed to transmit the awe and wonder of doing psychological treatment to therapy/counsellor trainees". Yet the search process conducted for this study revealed that there is in fact only a small body of literature which *explicitly* engages with and attempts to understand the phenomenon of wonder in a counselling and psychotherapeutic context.

In their book "*Nourishing the Spirit: The Healing Emotions of Wonder, Joy, Compassion and Hope*", Christian psychotherapists Whitehead and Whitehead (2012, p.12), draw on theology, philosophy and positive psychology to make an argument for the importance of wonder in enabling us: "to exit the confines of the obvious and the ordinary" and develop a heightened sense of psychological well-being. Ultimately, Whitehead and Whitehead's book is an inspirational self-help guide for clients which fails to develop any understanding of how wonder has a healing place within a clinical setting. In contrast, existential psychologist Kirk Schneider proposes an: "awe-based" psychotherapy and his writing attempts to describe what it is for him to experience wonder with his clients and the implications this might have for their healing. For Schneider, awe is "our fundamental relationship to mystery" (2009, p.7). A mixture of "dread, veneration and wonder," awe encompasses both spectrums of existence: the openness to uncertainty, possibility and newness and the sense of being overpowered and in despair at existence:

To fully accept awe in our lives is to fully accept the paradox, ambiguity, and absurdity of our condition. It is to fully accept that no matter what we think, feel, or do, it is always both wondrous and inept. It is wondrous because we can think, feel or do at all, that something beyond us enables us to think, feel or do: and it is inept because it is inevitably partial. (Schneider, 2011, p.6)

Schneider's writing, which is rich in examples from his own practice and the awe-based experiences of others, advocates for the importance of rediscovering awe to awaken new possibilities in psychology. In *Awakening to Awe*, for example, he presents a series of interviews: "down to earth stories" (2009, xii) with individuals who self-identify as "awe-inspired" in their personal and



professional lives. One of the interviewees, a psychologist, describes the pioneers of the humanistic movement such as Bugental, May and Rogers, who broadened the focus of psychology to “truly encounter mystery” and shared the guiding principle of standing in awe of their subject matter the human being” (p.75). By collapsing wonder within the category of awe, it is often difficult however to differentiate in Schneider’s writing the exact experience of wonder from veneration or capture the moment before it closes in dread or humility. Whereas Schneider offers what he regards as “core conditions – both favourable and unfavourable to the cultivation of awe-based awakening” (2009, p.xii), and there are accounts in his writings of when he feels a client has been in wonder, there are in fact few descriptions in his works of what it actually is for the therapist to “truly encounter mystery” (2009, p.75), or as Bugental proposes, “stand in awe of their subject matter the human being” (1995, p.189). My study was designed to elicit specific descriptions of wonder filled (as opposed to awe-inspired) moments such as these.

In their article exploring the role of silence and wonder in career counselling, Hansen and Amundson (2009) argue that there has been an “unnoticed ontological dimension” to career counselling. Making the claim that “it is only when we are in a resonance with our being as such that we can make wise decisions” (p.41), the authors argue that accessing a dimension of Being rather than doing: “is nothing less than a “Copernican Revolution” (p.41) in the thinking and practice of career counselling” (p.41). This radical shift they suggest: “can be achieved by the counsellor entering into a ‘community of wonder’” with their client. This “ability to wonder” (p.42), Hansen and Adumson argue, is the “fundamental condition” (p.42) which takes the therapist “one step” beyond the generally accepted Rogerian qualities of counselling into a potential state of being that the authors suggest resonates with Buber’s I-Thou relationship. Drawing on the philosophical discourse of wonder as opening to uncertainty and newness in the face of the most ordinary thereby freeing the wonderer from routine methods and rigid thinking, the authors offer Socratic dialogue infused with a more meditative, aesthetic awareness as the technique whereby a community of wonder can be realised. Hansen and Amundson in this article propose wonder as an important – currently unexamined – condition for counsellors to come closer with their clients to the being dimension of lived experience. For Hansen and Amundsen, the key significance of therapist wonder is the contribution it makes to the I-Thou relationship, which is described in the literature as the moment in which a practitioner is most open and present to his/her client’s unique humanity (Finlay, 2015; Halling, 2008; Hycner, 1993; Todres, 2007; Yalom, 2011; van Deurzen, 1999).

In *Between Person and Person: Towards a Dialogical Psychotherapy*, Hycner (1993, p 111) argues that for “a genuine dialogical stance” to occur, the therapist must “bracket”, as far as possible, prior assumptions. Wonder is the reductive method whereby this stance can be realised:

To prejudice, is to crush the emergence of new possibilities. It is the willingness of the therapist to always be surprised; not because of "naiveté," but because the therapist has not precipitously assumed what will happen. It requires a very sophisticated naiveté and professional astuteness to hold one's own ground, yet be constantly surprised by what is. To do therapy that is truly responsive to the needs of the client, the therapist has to have a sense of wonder; he has to allow himself to be amazed (*ibid.*, p.111).

The sense of therapist “surprise” and “amazement”, which Hycner foregrounds, is also described by Halling (2008, p.23), who suggests that in surprise and wonder our assumptions and expectations are: “brought into question in the face of some new and unanticipated reality”. For Halling, this capacity to see someone as if “for the first time” is essential to the dialogical I-Thou relationship which reveals the other in a deeper way, free of habitual ways of interacting. Inherent in the dialogical is an openness which means that the “self” is never self-enclosed (Todres, 2007, p.16), but called into question by the encounter with the other. For Todres, when the phenomenological therapist “wonders”, she/he dwells at the “edge of the unknown” and is thus in a place of great vulnerability herself/himself: “the kind of human openness in which we feel touched” (2007, p.162).

### **2.3.2 Medicine**

In his description of recovery from cancer, Frank (1999, p.126) implores the clinician to avoid the habitual and “remain alert to the possibility that the patient in front of her right now is different and significant consequences may hang on this”. By having an attitude of wonder, Frank suggests clinicians who are curious might perceive new directions/ideas which may be therapeutically significant, rather than resting in routinised patterns of treatment and diagnosis. Evans (2012, 2016) a medical doctor, makes similar claims to Frank that wonder offers a way to resist routine practice and work in a more ethical manner. He reflects on the recent increase of scholarly interest in wonder, but notes the lack of studies into wonder in the clinical encounter and argues for its relevance and importance in medical training.

### **2.3.3 Psychology and Biopsychology**

Keltner and Haidt (2003) and Lazarus (1991) observed that there has been remarkably little empirical research into the emotion of wonder in psychology. Maslow’s (1970) description of twenty-five features of “peak experiences” draws us close to a description of what is experienced in a moment of wonder and the transformative potential of such moments. In a recent study into the biological pathway between positive emotions and health, researchers (Stellar *et al.*, 2015) were surprised to discover that awe and wonder elicited the strongest response in terms of reducing pro-inflammatory cytokines. Another recent experimental study (Piff *et al.*, 2015) was designed to test the hypothesis that the closely related emotion of awe can result in a diminishment of concern for the individual self. It was discovered that research participants with a greater predisposition towards awe demonstrated increased ethical decision-making, increased generosity and prosocial values, decreased sense of entitlement and greater helping behaviours. Frijda’s (1986) study of the emotions included wonder but understood it as simply a response to something unexpected. A more recent psychological study has explored the biological substates of wonder as an emotion, especially its evolutionary and adaptive function, together with other emotions with which wonder is closely associated such as awe,

amazement and astonishment (Keltner and Haidt, 2003). Drawing on the evolutionary model of emotions which Plutchik (2000) has developed, Fuller (2006 p.65) suggests that: “distinct emotions are aroused by distinct biological processes and perform distinct biological functions”.

Emerging from such studies of the biological aspect of emotions, it is in the field of neuroscience (Bulkeley,2005; Fuller, 2006;Gallagher *et al.* 2015) where researchers are currently paying most attention to wonder, revealing the neuro-physiology involved in new cognition which inspires creativity and whole systems thinking arising from experiences of wonder. Work within the field of positive psychology suggests that wonder belongs to the category of emotions which “broaden and build” an “individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, which in turn has the effect of building that individual's physical, intellectual, and social resources” (Fredrickson, 1998, p.300).

Recent studies in the realm of neuroscience are therefore affirming, on a physiological level, what philosophy has regarded as a central tenet: that radical changes in cognition and perception occur when we experience wonder. Bulkeley (2002) argues that wonder is “clearly identifiable as a neurophysiological phenomenon that involves distinctive (if unusually intensified) modes of brain-mind activation” (p.4). Drawing upon his study of research in cognitive neuroscience, he further suggests that the “experiences of wonder have widespread and powerfully stimulating effects on the association cortex” which potentially: “compel the creation of new, more expansive categories and new, more subtly integrated modes of understanding” (*ibid.*, p.4). He also proposes the hypothesis that experiences of wonder: “involve a relatively high degree of activation in the right hemisphere of the cerebral cortex” (*ibid.*, p.4) which if true, might open new ways of understanding the spatial-temporal transformations described in accounts of wonder. The heightened sense of openness which characterises wonder, Bulkeley also suggests involves:

[A] relative deactivation in of those areas of the prefrontal cortex that are responsible for goal-directed cognition, what many neuroscientists regard as the “executive” functions of the brain-mind system (Kandel et al., 2000) ... Wonder has an auto-telic quality; it generates a strong sense of the fullness of the present, which has the effect of “dethroning” ordinary plans, purposes, and motivations. Many experiences of wonder are characterized by an unusual receptivity and radical openness (which is not the same as passivity), and in neuro-scientific terms I suspect this quality corresponds to a relative deactivation in the prefrontal cortex. (Bulkeley, 2002, p.7)

Recent research into how curiosity increases brain capacity by modulating hippocampus dependent learning via the dopaminergic circuit (Gruber, Gelman and Ranganath, 2014), seems to affirm Bulkeley's hypothesis of the possibility that there is a neurobiological aspect to the philosophical position that wonder in the origins of thinking. Inasmuch as wonder “frees us from fixed anticipation and cognitive sets” (Fuller, 2006, p.8), wonder is a source of our capacity to conceive the possible, it enables us to experience new perspectives and respond in creative ways. The neurobiological research Bulkeley proposes is an exploration into the hypothesis that the experience of wonder does in fact mobilise physiological perceptual and cognitive changes which increases our peripheral vision. Through wonder we become connected with our wider environment and are invited to connect with an order of reality beyond or behind sensory appearance.

Between 2011 and 2013 a large, well designed, interdisciplinary neuro-phenomenological research project was carried out with the intention of replicating and investigating the “consciousness involved in the experiences of awe and wonder had by astronauts during space travel” (Gallagher *et al.* 2015, p.10). In addition to phenomenological investigations of their subjects’ lived experience, the researchers sought to understand what was happening on a “sub personal, neuronal level” (*ibid.* p. xx). This was achieved by constructing a simulated environment in which non-astronaut participants were fitted with physiological sensors as they took part in immersive virtual space-travel. The neurobiological data was correlated with the data derived from the psychological self-reported surveys participants completed during the experience, and the phenomenological interviews conducted directly afterwards. In terms of neurological findings which correlated to experiences of awe and wonder, the authors reported:

- a) There was lots of activity present in the left hemisphere associated with expressive language. The researchers suggest that this evidence provides: “some important hints in the difficulty that some participants had in expressing precisely what these experiences were” (Gallagher, 2015, p.104). From the researchers’ standpoint this was something that requires further exploration.
- b) Those participants who experienced awe and wonder had greater rates of alpha-suppression which indicates the “broader cortical activation required to synthesize consciousness, perception and working memory” (Gallagher, 2015, pp.109-10).

As the authors themselves acknowledge, these findings only gain significance when considered in the context of the phenomenological, first-person accounts which formed another strand of the study. I describe this strand and findings in more detail in the next section.

## **2.4 Empirical Studies of Wonder**

Verhoeven (1972) argues that wonderers reach their limits of language when attempting to describe their experience. This struggle was neurologically indicated by Gallagher *et al.* (2015) and possibly accounts, in part, for the relative lack of empirical studies into wonder as a phenomenon. The four empirical studies disclosed during this period of research are the focus of this final section of my literature review.

### **2.4.1 Three Phenomenological Investigations**

- a) Richard Hycner’s (1976) unpublished doctoral thesis is a phenomenological enquiry into the experience of wonder in which he identifies twenty thematic “dimensions” (see Appendix 1) and a subsequent reflection on how wonder might be relevant to psychotherapy. Hycner’s question: “Would you please describe as fully as possible an experience of wonder which is most striking to you” (1976

p.65), was very similar to the one I asked my own participants when inviting them to write their lived experience description. His study differs from mine, however, in that none of his four participants were therapists. Hycner's implications for therapy are therefore deduced not from experiences of wonder in a therapeutic context, but from experiences emerging from a range of contexts such as the wondrous apprehension of a foetus in a test-tube to becoming wonder-struck by the face of a lover. In his concluding chapter, Hycner offers one short example from his own clinical practice, describing a moment of wonder he witnessed between two clients:

At that moment, after they had stopped crying, Trish was looking wide-eyed at Dorothy and said "Dorothy, I don't think I've ever really seen your face this way. It's like I've never really seen it before. It's just amazing." It was obvious in the look in Trish's face that something totally new and fresh was seen in her friend's face. She was seeing Dorothy in a fresh and wondrous way, as if she had never really seen Dorothy before. It seemed that it was not just the intimacy with this specific person which was involved, but also the sense of wonder about the event which was healing. (Hycner, 1976, p.174)

Drawing upon both his findings and the wider literature, Hycner concludes that wonder is an important aspect of human experience for psychotherapeutic practice. He maintains that wonder "seems to be innately healing" (p.172) in its capacity to generate a sense of wholeness (p.170). In envisioning a therapy which takes "wonder into account" (pp.170-171), Hycner suggests that the mysterious will be foregrounded over the problematic, uniqueness will be celebrated and there will be an openness to possibilities. These aspects, Hycner argues, will act as a corrective to the "technocratic consciousness which so permeates our society" (p.167) and which has resulted in "a schizoid state of alienation" (p.169).

When critiquing Hycner's study, it is important to recognise that it was conducted at a time when qualitative research was still relatively undeveloped and so his research, viewed from the perspective of today's expectations of criticality, reflexivity and rigour in his descriptive phenomenological research can be seen as somewhat naïve in places. There is, for example, an over-reliance on description in the review of literature; a frequent slippage away from the "fidelity to the phenomenon" (p.41) to which he aspires; a failure to adequately describe the analytical process by which he determined his thematic "dimensions"; a lack of critical awareness of how his own pre-conceptions shaped the interview process; inadequate consideration of how the potential bias in choosing participants with whom he had an existing relationship might have shaped the data. Whilst not seeking to dismiss the findings which emerge from this study, it is nonetheless clear that evidence of methodological weaknesses potentially undermines the validity of Hycner's findings and the subsequent conclusions he draws regarding implications for therapy. Nevertheless, Hycner's study is important as it is a rare example of phenomenological enquiry into wonder, and I see my own research as building on and developing this work.

In entitling his thesis "The experience of wonder: A phenomenological *sketching* (my emphasis) and its implications for therapy", Hycner perhaps indicates here the tentativeness of his study and the associations he subsequently draws. While he writes with passion and vision – drawing on existing

literature to promote the centrality of wonder in therapy, the link between the implications he proposes and the dimensions of wonder elicited from his research data is not clearly made. There is a sense that rather than the implications emerging from the data, these were pre-existing concepts or assumptions which he substantiates by drawing upon his data. As I have made clear in this review of literature, I share with Hycner a conviction that wonder is a significant human experience for therapy. By directly inviting my research participants to describe an experience of wonder which occurred in their clinical practice, this study comes much closer to describing the therapeutic possibilities of the phenomenon Hycner foresaw. My intention is that any interpretations of the meaning of wonder for therapy will emerge from the data and my own assumptions which shape these interpretations will be transparent. In chapter five I compare more closely my own findings with Hycner's, and reflect upon whether the implications Hycner proposed actually emerged in the lived experiences described by my participants.

Whilst I have outlined some of the methodological weaknesses in Hycner's study, one of its strengths is in its suggestion that "in this kind of research, especially with this topic, there also needs to be a sense of wonder in the researcher" (Hycner, 1976, p.68). In this approach, Hycner anticipates the work of later researchers such as Hansen (2012), Loyttyneimi (2005) and van Manen (2014). Drawing on Maslow (1970), Hycner argues that: "The findings are greatly enriched when the researcher's own sense of wonder helps to sensitize him/her to what is unfolding in his/her presence" (1976, p.68). One aspect of wonder which emerged in his research is that "Recall of wonder is wondrous ... That in talking about their wondrous experiences, they were able to start re-experiencing that wonder" (p.165). Whereas Hycner's approach to interviewing is dialogical and orientated towards the emergent, a study of his research transcripts reveals that he misses the opportunity to invite his participants to phenomenologically describe these moments of emergent wonder or reflexively describe what it like to be in the presence of someone in the process of wonder. His study nevertheless points towards research orientated towards wonder which, he suggests, could be picked up and developed by future researchers. My own study could indeed be seen as responding to this invitation.

b) The doctoral thesis of Philo Hove (1996), also examines the experiential dimensions of wonder. Based on his premise that: "mindful meditation may be regarded a method for promoting wonder" (p.5), Hove offers a phenomenology of wonder as an experience of "insight". He presents the findings of his separate empirical study into "the unique experiential character of meditation retreats" (p.126) before concluding his thesis with an extended reflection on the wider pedagogical significance of wonder in education.

Despite its methodological weaknesses, Hycner's (1976) structured report is scientific in design and aims towards transparency of process. By contrast, Hove's (1996) objective is not to detail his methodological approach. He provides only the briefest of indications in end notes as to how he

conducted the study in terms of data collection. His stated concern is rather to generate descriptions and analyses which are “sufficiently “evocative and precise” to yield what is possible” of the two experiences of wonder and meditation retreats (p.126). Positioning himself in the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition of van den Berg (1955) and van Manen (2014), Hove (1996) weaves together quotations and analysis of a wide range of philosophical and literary sources, his own lived experience and interview data from his twenty-seven research participants. A significant marker of the validity of Hove’s findings rests on whether he elicits in his reader a resonant sense of wonder.

Hycner (1976) argues that the recall of wonder is wondrous and Verhoeven (1972) argues that commentators of wonder should aim to generate wonder. Drawing on my own response to his phenomenological narrative, I suggest Hove’s study succeeds in creating a phenomenology of wonder which evokes wonder. On a personal level, I was wonderstruck by the evocative quality of his writing. For a moment, I wondered if there was anything for me to contribute in terms of further understanding. Reading his account, I suggest, gave me a direct encounter with the six themes he identified (see Appendix 1): I was brought to a standstill; I was left speechless by his descriptions; my eyes were opened into new ways of seeing wonder; I felt vulnerable as my own identity as a scholar of wonder was threatened by the vastness and complexity of the phenomenon he discloses. Crucially though, as well as leaving me temporarily stalled in my research, Hove’s work also renewed in me *the call of wonder* which prompted me to move forward again with renewed insight and a sense of the meaningfulness of my project.

Hove’s is a significantly more sophisticated investigation than Hycner’s in terms of its levels of criticality, reflexivity, positioning of the research within the wider literature and evocation of the phenomenon of wonder. There are nevertheless some marked similarities in approach to participants and the subsequent findings between the two. Both researcher’s emphasise the appropriateness of phenomenology as an approach to investigate wonder; both stress the importance of the dialogical and conversational when collecting interview data about wonder; both acknowledge wonder as a method and the importance of the researcher placing themselves in the “current of wonder” (Hove, 1985, p.88). In the context of my own study, these are aspects of researching wonder I critically reflect on in chapters three and five of this dissertation.

c) Four key research questions guided the interdisciplinary study conducted by Gallagher *et al.* (2015). Firstly, was it possible to categorise the phenomenon of awe and wonder experienced by astronauts during space travel? Secondly, could these experiences be operationalised in an experimental setting? Thirdly, was it possible to measure the neurophysiological correlates of awe and wonder? Fourthly, what aspects of an individual’s personal background or psychology “play into the experiences”? (p.7). Gallagher *et al.* argue that answering these questions demands a complex methodology. Taking the position that the “brain-body-environment” (p.103) is a dynamic, interconnected system, the research team adopted Francisco Varela’s (1995) multi-method, neurophenomenology. This involved the triangulation of first- and third-person data from

psychological, phenomenological and neurophysiological investigations. Given the scope and complexity of this study, my focus here is on what contributions the project made to understanding the lived experience of wonder and where its findings confirm or contest other empirical studies of the phenomenon.

The first stage of the study was to derive a set of categories to describe the phenomena of awe and wonder emerging from the published writings and interviews of forty-five astronauts. Working with “tentative, preliminary, provisional” definitions of awe and wonder, a single researcher conducted: “an initial sorting,” (p.22) identifying descriptions which resonated with the definitions:

*Awe*: a direct and initial experience or feeling when faced with something amazing, incomprehensible or sublime.

*Wonder*: a reflective experience motivated when one is unable to put things into a familiar conceptual framework – leading to open questions rather than conclusions (*ibid.*, p.22).

Having identified this body of phenomena-rich data, Gallagher *et al.* (2015) began their analytical process. An initial phase of computer-driven syntactical analysis revealed that the immediacy of in-flight “space logs” resulted in more concrete descriptions of “experiential closeness” and “lived-feeling” (p.21) than occurred in the reflective journals or interviews. The same texts were then given to two primary investigators who undertook a hermeneutic analysis, clustering experiences into forty-eight “consensual categories”. For these categories to be validated, the texts were subsequently given to twenty readers from different academic fields, who sought to identify passages which corresponded to the forty-eight categories. From this verification process a final set of thirty-four categories was agreed upon (see Appendix 1).

The second stage of research was designed to test if these same categories of experience could be reproduced in an experimental setting. This consisted of seventy-one participants individually entering a space-flight simulator which recreated the sense that they were looking at the earth from outer space. During the simulation, participants were measured for neurophysiological reactions to their experiences, and completed in-flight surveys to capture the immediacy of experience. In-depth phenomenological interviews took place directly after the simulation.

Triangulating data from hermeneutic analysis of texts, neurophysiological measures, surveys, psychological self-reports and interviews provided the research team with insight into different aspects of the phenomena. While some participants’ lived experiences did not resonate with the categories deduced from the astronaut descriptions, Gallagher *et al.* (2015) determined that there was sufficient correlation of data to suggest that experiences of awe and wonder can be operationalised and that their categories offer a valid description of what it is to experience awe and wonder in space:

Here we look at specific examples. First participant 14, a 20 year old female in the FOC group, expressed varying levels of experience in multiple consensus categories: contentment (e.g. tranquillity, relaxation), feeling overwhelmed, experiencing perspectival (spatial) change, bodily sensations of floating, and scale effects (e.g. vastness of universe, feeling of relative smallness). (Gallagher, 2015, p.97)



Correlating self-report surveys and neurophysiological data suggested that individuals who identify as religious are more likely to experience a sense of awe, whereas those who identify as spiritual were more predisposed to wonder. That wonder “may be enhanced in people with certain self-identified profiles” (p.168) confirms the findings of other studies (Piff *et al.*, 2015; Keltner and Haidt, 2003). Neurophysiological findings, when correlated with interview data, indicated that experiences of wonder exist at the limits of human expression and “involve complex patterns of lower alpha and increased beta neutral oscillations” (p.169).

As Gallagher *et al.* (2015) themselves concede, the richness of description emerging from the phenomenological interviews provided alternative perspectives on the experience of awe and wonder which exceeded the categorisation developed in the study (p.98). Rather than being a limitation, the authors argue that the presence of such tension ensures that the research avoids becoming purely reductive. In this way, they argue, the methodology carries significant potential as an approach to investigating the complex psychology and neurophysiology of human consciousness as it unfolds in awe and wonder. Whilst the authors are transparent in representing rather than smoothing the tensions and contradictions of correlating data from different domains of investigation, there is nevertheless an inherently reductive aspect to neurophenomenology. With an emphasis on categorisation and triangulation, complexity is communicated and phenomenological interviewing: “allows for researchers to take seriously individual experiences”, but a holistic sense of the emergent nature of phenomena not as well realised. More phenomenologically descriptive and interpretative studies, such as that conducted by Hove, Hycner and myself, which emphasise the evocative and invitational aspect of phenomena, complement studies such as the one conducted by Gallaher *et al.* (2015). These more reflexive phenomenological accounts offer an opportunity to bring texture, nuance and deeper awareness of the dimensions of lived experience identified by the more cognitive orientation of neurophenomenology. While it is not possible to easily generalise from the unique experiences of phenomenological research, the study by Gallagher *et al.* – with its rigorously developed categories – does offer a useful thematic structure against which to compare and contrast other phenomenological studies of wonder. I discuss the study in the context of my own project in chapters five and six.

While each of the three phenomenological studies discussed above sought to reveal the lived experience of wonder, there were differences in terms of their research design, methodological rigour, levels of reflexivity and levels of sustained focus on participants’ lived experience as opposed to other dimensions of wonder. Nevertheless, when comparing the findings of the three studies, there exists a level of consensus in terms of how they categorise the lived experience of wonder. Hycner presents his interpretation of data in a list of discrete categories in a similar manner to that adopted by Gallagher *et al.* Hove eschews such reductive classification, drawing instead on the approach of van Manen (1990, 2014) by synthesising his findings into six descriptive themes. Nevertheless, these themes encompass many of the dimensions of experience identified by the other two researchers. All three researchers emphasise the openness that wonder engenders; its ineffability; a sense of

surprise; stillness and silence; of perceptual changes; seeing things in a new way; of being caught, taken, over-whelmed by the experience; a sense of oneness and connection; that wonder is pleasurable; of how the usual is rendered unusual; of a heightened sense of presence and interest; a sense of connected with others; deep interest (see Appendix 1).

## 2.4.2 A Grounded Theory Approach

The final empirical study into wonder disclosed by my search process was Gordon Medlock's (2015) grounded theory investigation into: "*The Emergence of Wonder*". Drawing on twenty "intensive" interviews with members of an artistic community in Mexico, Medlock proposed two central variables to the artistic process: wonderment and emergence. He argues that there is a "dynamic by which an artist's initial experience of wonderment emerges and becomes embodied in the content and form of the artist's work" (p.4). Wonder, Medlock proposes is the phenomenon which most captures the early stage experiences of artistic process – the inspirational spark, the "wow" moment. But he also suggests that an attitude of wonder is "the context from which creative artistic works emerge. This openness gives rise to moments of being wonderstruck that provide the inspiration for specific works" (p.4). Wonder for Medlock (2005, p.6) is a complex:

[B]lending of intense emotional experiences of admiration, surprise, astonishment, and amazement, as well the expression of more reflective qualities of curiosity, questioning, and doubt. It encompasses a spectrum of emotional and cognitive experiences of surprising, unexpected, and often uplifting and inexplicable aspects of reality and human existence.

Throughout the article, Medlock refers to the artists' inspirational experiences of wonder which they then transform into a specific artistic medium. Yet we don't get close to what is for the artists to be in wonder. By choosing a grounded theory approach, rather than a phenomenological approach to his research, Medlock conveys a strong sense of the significance of wonder as a key variable of creativity but not the lived experience of that inspirational moment. That this experience is concretised into artistic form is the expression of wonder which exists on the edges of this research. My own research has resonance with Medlock's study, in that I am also inviting participants to reflect on the emergence of wonder in their professional life. In the aspect of psychotherapy, offering participants opportunities to generate new insights, new meanings and alternative narratives for living, it could also be described as a creative practice. Where my study contributes new knowledge is that it will foreground, rather than have in the back ground, as Medlock's study does, descriptions of that moment of emergent wonder.

## 2.5 Chapter Summary

In providing an indicative review of key issues, challenges and themes in the philosophical literature on wonder, I have revealed it as a phenomenon prized across time for its role in human lived experience. Yet, this review has also revealed that in the field of psychology and psychotherapy, the actual lived experience wonder, is an under-researched but philosophically and potentially ethically

significant phenomenon. I suggest that my study occupies a space in this literature in three ways. Firstly, it contributes to the growing body of cross-disciplinary scholars interested in the significance of wonder to a range of human practices. Secondly, this study addresses the most challenging aspect of the phenomenon: what it *is* to describe the experience of wonder. Thirdly, given the explicitly philosophical foundations of existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, I suggest that this study directly engages with what has been a key area of philosophical enquiry, thus providing a valuable resource for therapists to reflect on, in their practice.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The Wonder of all wonders is Pure Ego and pure consciousness: and precisely this wonder disappears as soon as the light of phenomenology falls upon it and subjects it to eidetic analysis. The wonder disappears by changing into an entire science with a plethora of difficult scientific problems. (Husserl, 1980, p.60)

## 3.0 Introduction

A number of research studies have investigated, using quantitative methods, the hypotheses that positive emotions such as awe and wonder promote health (Stellar *et al*, 2015) and ethical behaviour (Piff, 2015). The neuro-phenomenological study by Gallagher *et al.*, (2015) used a mixed-methods approach which incorporated statistical analysis to test the hypothesis that certain patterns of neurological activity correlate with aspects of awe and wonder. Whilst quantitative studies such as these have opened up new understanding or confirmed previous assumptions about wonder and associated emotions, such approaches do not generate the phenomenal richness I sought in order to offer insight into the lived experience of wonder.

My review of literature disclosed wonder as a phenomenon which exists at the limit of language. In wonder we move between a fluidity of openness to the moment where perceptions are emergent and the sedimentation where meaning-making occurs. In terms of the methodology most suited to investigating an ephemeral phenomenon, I therefore determined that a qualitative approach which was inductive, emergent and embraced diverse realities as being the most appropriate. There are currently no empirical studies providing insight into what it is like for a psychotherapist to wonder, so a qualitative approach, which would generate description-rich data, would offer insight into the experience.

What characterises all qualitative approaches such as narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology is that they produce thick description of subjective experience (Creswell, 2013). Despite this core resonance and some multidisciplinary blending of methods, key differences between the approaches informed my choice of which methodology would generate the singular focus on disclosing the lived experiences and meanings of psychotherapist wonder I sought. Grounded theory for example is orientated towards discovery and with its iterative approach to generating knowledge has the potential to reveal the complexity and contextuality of emergent topics (Charmez, 2003) such as psychotherapist wonder. My intention however was not to generate theories of such wonder but to come close to it as a lived experience. With its focus on eliciting and analysing participant stories, narrative research suggested greater potential for generating the focussed attention on experience at the heart of my research question. Narrative researchers are however interested in how participant experiences are woven into a narrative rather than the experience as a phenomenon in itself. How the experience is told, the causal links, the chain of experiences is

significant to the narrative researcher (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007) whereas the focus of my research is on disclosing the experience of wonder as phenomenon in psychotherapeutic practice. Ultimately, therefore, it was the dialogical, emergent, deeply reflexive, richly expressive methodology of phenomenology, with its epistemological underpinnings in making visible that which is invisible, which I anticipated would enable my coming closest to, and being most responsive to, perceiving and giving expression to a therapist's lived experience of wonder, which itself exists on the threshold of what is known and unknown.

### **3.1 Phenomenological Research**

Several commentators of phenomenological research (Finlay and Evans, 2009; Flood, 2010; Laverty, 2003; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007) have observed that some studies lack theoretical rigour by failing to engage with and articulate the epistemological and ontological underpinnings informing the particular phenomenological methodology being used. In the following paragraphs, I outline a brief account of phenomenology with the intention of describing how the methodology I used was congruent with both my research question and personal values.

Phenomenology, which began with Husserl's desire to develop a scientific method which would reveal the essential structures of phenomena, has been modified and developed over time to emerge as a diverse epistemological and ontological field. Critical literature (Finlay, 2011; Flood, 2010; Kakkori, 2009; Laverty, 2003; Lopez and Willis, 2004; van Manen, 1990; Wojnar, 2007) has identified two main strands of phenomenology: descriptive, which is based in Husserl's theories and hermeneutic or interpretative, which was developed by Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricouer. Husserl's phenomenology aims to describe the universal essences or eidetic structures which are shared by all those individuals who have a lived experience of particular phenomena. Whilst acknowledging the interpenetration of perceiver consciousness and phenomenon, Husserl felt that the impact of context could be bracketed out through different methods of reduction allowing us to "return to the thing itself". Heidegger, however, argued that humans are always embedded in lived experience, and so context can never be bracketed out. For Heidegger, "phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of being ... to the understanding of the being of this being" (Kakkori, 2009, p.21). Every encounter necessitates an interpretation which is influenced by the individual's situatedness in terms of social, cultural, historical facticity. Understanding for Heidegger is therefore not arriving at an essential structure of lived experience, but becoming aware of the interpretative influences: the being of this being.

The various research methodologies defining themselves as phenomenological are, however, not easily divided into these two categories: descriptive and hermeneutic (interpretative) but exist along a continuum (Finlay, 2011). The particular position on the continuum adopted ultimately informs the position of the researcher, the choice of methods and data analysis shapes the significance of context in the conceptualisation of essence, places emphasis on the degree of reflexivity advocated and

results in differing levels of certainty in the final description of the phenomena being studied affecting issues of rigour.

Adopting a more descriptive phenomenological approach to my enquiry into wonder, such as that developed by Giorgi (2009) or Colaizzi (1978), was attractive in that it would lead to a rich description of the essential structures shared by psychotherapists with a lived experience of wonder, which have not been previously conceptualised. Wonder is associated with the moment of encountering newness or the unknown, where experience has yet to sediment into language, categories or definitions (Fuller, 2006; Bulkeley, 2005). Choosing a phenomenological approach which is located in hermeneutics was more suitable to explicating “meanings and assumptions in the participants’ texts that participants may have difficulty in articulating” (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007, p.617). Thayer (2003, p.86) argues that:

Hermeneutic phenomenology can be seen as a method of research, which is not primarily a mode of interpretation with certain rules of practice, a practice of clarifying or aligning with the act of understanding itself. It is the art of bringing to light that which has previously remained hidden, a process of revealing meaning.

Crucially, in terms of my own theoretical position, I would have difficulties with more descriptive approaches which seek universals in terms of pure essence. My own way of understanding, grounded in social constructionism and post-structuralist feminist perspectives, is more interpretative. As Wojnar and Swanson (2007, p.178) identify in their description of researchers more suited to interpretative methodologies: “I lean towards relishing nuance, I appreciate difference, I embrace ambiguity and seek uniqueness in contextualized lived experience.”

### **3.2 Phenomenology and the Poetics of Wonder**

One of the challenges I faced in this study was how both I and my research participants would address the gap between experiencing wonder and the words to describe it. As Romanyshyn (2007, p.9) describes:

I had that experience, or better, it had me, and yet there was at that moment, and there remains even now in my memory, the felt sense of the gap between the full, rich ripeness of that occasion of awakening and the words to describe it.

Romanyshyn proposes that the researcher adopt the position of the “failed poet” who dwells in that gap between experience and the “failure” of language, as “one who is able to bear the tension between knowing and not-knowing” (p.11). Adopting the stance of “failed poet” appealed to me as an appropriate position from which to describe the phenomena of wonder which exists on the edge of meaning.

Various phenomenological researchers have argued that the nature of the phenomenon itself should shape the methodological approach to its investigation (Giorgi, 1971; Hycner, 1985; van Manen, 2014). In choosing my own research methods, I felt it was important to acknowledge the discourse on the ineffability of wonder which had consistently emerged from the literature. Hansen describes this

discourse, using Scharmer's concepts, as the "not-yet-embodied knowledge" and "self-transcending knowledge" of wonder (Hansen, 2012, p.11). In many ways, the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) of Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) would have provided a clear methodological framework and been epistemologically congruent with my intention to investigate a phenomenon which tests the limits of language. IPA, for example, offers an engagement with the moment at which an experience "becomes an experience" (*ibid.* p.33), it recognises the uniqueness of accounts and does not apply pre-defined categories. I determined, however, that there were other interpretative methodologies described in the literature (Finlay, 2009; Finlay and Evans 2009) which carried greater sensitivity towards giving written expression in research to the ineffable. Todres' *Embodied Enquiry* (Todres, 2011) and van Manen's *Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Practice* (van Manen, 1990, 2014) both place emphasis on moving towards describing lived experience, which is marked by silence and absence as much as presence. Van Manen in particular points to the importance of acknowledging silence and how this is experienced spatially, temporally, relationally and physically in the research process. He calls researchers to pay attention to the epistemological silence we confront when we face the unspeakable and the ontological silence of Being within research (1990, pp.112-13).

In his exploration of the aesthetic dimension of phenomenological enquiry, Todres (2011) observes that whilst researchers provide the structure of human experience through a description of "context related themes" (p.8) what can be lacking is the textural dimension of the individual's experience. He argues that it was Heidegger who restored texture to understanding through his emphasis on "how mood provides an important ontological context for perception and understanding" (Todres, 2011, p.9). It was Heidegger's later turn towards the aesthetic – especially poetic discourse – which further created a means of communicating this textural dimension of individual lived experience. Affirming this stance, van Manen (1984, p.4) declares:

Phenomenology is a poetizing project ... It tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice into an original singing of the world. But poetizing is not merely a type of poetry, a making of verses. Poetizing is a thinking on original experience and is thus speaking in a more primal sense.

In order to disclose the pre-reflective, "intuitive presence" (Todres, p.47) of wonder's texture as a counter-balance to my description of its thematic structure, I have also turned towards the evocative dimensions of poetry in both my interpretative process and presentation of findings.

### **3.3 Max van Manen: Phenomenology of Practice**

Whilst I drew on the ideas of other hermeneutic-phenomenological researchers such as Hycner (1976) and Glesne (1997), for this research project I have been primarily guided by the approach described by van Manen (1990, 2014). Underpinned by the philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer, van Manen's research is orientated towards seeking an understanding of what it is to be human, the possibilities for being-in-the world and the meanings individuals confer upon the world through an examination of human expression. As Hansen has noted, van Manen's approach, is also "very explicit concerning the importance of having a truly wonder-based approach when doing phenomenology"

(2012 p.15). His methods recognise the fundamental linguistic quality of human existence and are particularly sensitive to the poetic dimension of existence, which I regard as particularly significant when researching ineffable phenomenon.

Sharing Gadamer's scepticism of method, van Manen (1990, p.29) argues that there are no "fixed procedures, techniques and concepts" governing hermeneutic phenomenological research. Instead, as Langdrige points out, van Manen stresses the need for a "creative engagement with method" (Langdrige, 2007, p.122). His approach, which researchers have drawn on within the health services, education and psychology, should therefore be seen as a heuristic. As a guide to practice, van Manen (1990, pp30-31) has offered an elemental methodological structure for hermeneutic phenomenological research which he argues can be seen as a dynamic interplay among six procedural activities:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

The ways in which I used these six activities to guide my research process are illustrated throughout this chapter. For example, my initial heuristic investigation of wonder (1); my research design which created opportunities for participants to actively explore different aspects of their lived experience (2); the reflexive analytical process I adopted which was focussed on disclosing essential qualities of the phenomenon (3); foregrounding the interpretative process inherent in my own writing and that of participants (4); maintaining a clear, focussed attention on the individual participant's experience of wonder, and how my historicity governed the prejudice and fore-knowledge I brought to understanding (5); the need for periodically stepping back from close analytical focus on particular aspects of wonder to be reminded of the whole context within which the experience emerged (6).

Recognising the need to operationalise hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, van Manen (1990) has also described a range of research procedures which relate to these six activities. There is no prescriptive method for research, instead a creative engagement with the methods is advocated. This allowed me, as researcher, to draw on and adapt methods, as necessary, in response to the phenomenon of wonder. The sections in this chapter on data collection methods and data analysis and the sections on writing up in chapter six describe and justify the various choices I made along the research journey.



### **3.4 Participants**

Different methodologies require specific approaches to sampling and recruitment of participants. The nature of participant experience and involvement also varies according to the methodology chosen. In this section I outline the various choices I made during this study in relation to inclusion criteria, recruitment strategies, my sampling practice and the demographic of participants who became involved. Deciding to call those who joined my study “participants” rather than “co-researchers” is itself a revealing statement. There was a heightened level of mutuality and disruption of traditional researcher/participant hierarchies in the interview process which might indicate we were in fact “co-researchers”. As will be described in later sections of this chapter, I stopped short of involving the participants in ongoing dialogue about the emerging findings so to describe them as “co-researchers” implies a more participatory form of research than actually took place.

#### **3.4.1 Criteria**

In order to identify participants who were rich in the experience of wonder in a clinical context, I used purposive sampling of eight existentially-orientated post-qualification psychotherapists and psychologists. By existentially-orientated therapists, I refer to those practitioners who apply ideas from existential and hermeneutic philosophy to their practice within a phenomenological methodological framework. There was no deception of participants. They were all informed of the aims of the research and the methodology I would be using. There were no exclusion criteria for this study in terms of age, sexuality, gender, spirituality, ethnicity, or geographical location.

Although this was not a high-risk study with vulnerable participants, it is not possible to predict the ethical dilemmas that may rise from the sharing of personal experience during the interview. In my information to participants, I therefore required my participant had access to personal therapy/ professional supervision in order to address any distress that may have arisen as a consequence of participating in this study.

The world of existential psychotherapy is relatively small and as a practitioner I attend many conferences and training courses. I decided that I would include participants even if they were previously known to me, but would be reflexively attentive to how this familiarity impacted on the interview process, analysis and choices I made in terms of representing data. This is discussed more fully in chapter six.

#### **3.4.2 Recruitment**

In terms of my recruitment strategy, I emailed fliers describing my proposed research and the inclusion criteria of potential participants (see Appendix 2) to therapists via training institutes in the UK, Ireland and US which have an existential dimension to their training. I also distributed fliers at

conferences and emailed them to colleagues who had identified an interest in the topic of wonder. I invited recipients to distribute the information to others for a potential snowballing effect. I also posted the flier in forums for existential societies in the UK and abroad. Given the international nature of this recruitment strategy, I initially intended to conduct all interviews by Skype. One participant (Ruben) preferred to be interviewed in person and we arranged for this to take place in a private room in a city we were both visiting as participants to a conference.

I interviewed all of the individuals who responded to my recruitment strategy. I personally knew five of the participants in a purely professional capacity from psychotherapy trainings and conferences. While it was easier, at the start of the interviews, to establish rapport with participants with whom I already had some existing relationship, once we began the singular focus on the phenomenon of wonder, there was actually little to distinguish these in dialogical terms or in the depth of experience described.

### **3.4.3 Sample Size**

Phenomenological research does not aim for generalisation, so sample size in this study is not an empirical sample related to a wider population of existential psychotherapists. My sample size is more properly related to the question van Manen (2014, p.353) asks: "How many examples of concrete experiential descriptions would be appropriate for this study in order to explore the phenomenological meanings of this or that phenomenon?" I was not looking for what was characteristic or aiming for saturation, but for sufficient examples to offer insight into the lived experience of wonder. My initial proposal indicated that I would interview ten participants, but after eight interviews I sensed that I had enough sufficiently rich and evocative data to begin developing an understanding and description of the lived experience of wonder.

### **3.4.4 Participant Demographic**

Due to our prior collegiate contact, I already knew some personal details of five participants (see Appendix 3) such as marital status, sexuality, ethnicity and religious/spiritual orientation. I suggested earlier that our understandings of wonder are shaped by the socio-historical-cultural context in which it is being described. All eight participants lived in Westernised countries and from their interviews it emerged that most were familiar with Eastern philosophies and culture. I chose against formally requesting personal information, as this would always be a partial representation of the dimensions of their existence and I did not intend to situate/interpret participants' subjective experience of wonder in the context of their individual case portraits unless they raised this through their own reflections in the interviews. It was, however, interesting that all but one of the participants were men. Whilst the sample was too small to draw any wider conclusions about the significance of this gender to wonder, I consider the dominance of male participants in chapter six.

## **3.5 Ethical Awareness**

All research carries risk, so awareness of, and sensitivity to, the problem of how producing knowledge is experienced by those involved is at the heart of research ethics. The way in which my data was collected, interpreted and presented variously affected both myself and participants, so attention to addressing any harmful impact was a central concern in conducting this study

### **3.5.1 Ethical Approval**

Ethical approval was given by the Middlesex University, School of Health and Social Sciences Health Studies Ethics' Sub-committee on 7 May, 2014. While recruiting participants, I gained further ethical approval on 29 April, 2015, to enable me to interview one participant who preferred to be interviewed in person.

### **3.5.2 Informed Consent**

The potential risks and potential benefits to participants were communicated in the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 4) and Consent Forms (see Appendix 5). This information formed an initial contract giving details of the study, confidentiality, data protection arrangements and the fact that participants were free to withdraw at any point in the study without needing to provide an explanation. These documents also communicated from the outset that the research findings would be disseminated and that participants would be anonymised. As informed and voluntary consent is a dynamic process which requires continuous renegotiation throughout the research process, in the debriefing sheet given to each participant key information relating to consent, risks, data handling and protection were repeated (see Appendix 6).

Reflecting on the experience of my pilot project interview (discussed more fully in chapter six) I realised that adopting a wondering attitude in collecting data could lead to a heightened level of intimacy between researcher and participant which might prompt more levels of disclosure than initially intended. I became more alert to this potential in subsequent interviews. Following instances of emergent wonder in the interview I also gave participants an opportunity to share with me their experience of being interviewed and where particularly more personal/emotional information was disclosed by participants I double-checked that they still gave permission for me to include their data in the study.

### **3.5.3 Confidentiality**

The community of existentially-orientated practitioners is a relatively small one, so maintaining anonymity and the confidentiality of participants' data was a key ethical consideration in this study. I indicated in my information sheet that interviews would be transcribed by the researcher, and while research supervisors would have access to the original transcripts, before anyone else reviewed my data a system of coding would be used to protect participant identity. I reassured participants that in any subsequent publications of my research, participant identities would be anonymised. I was aware of security issues around email, so participants were informed that rather than using email, they were free to mail hard copies of their written descriptions to me.

One participant sent me an article, which had been published in a prominent psychotherapy journal, as his written lived experience description. Whilst I analysed the material in the same way that I approached other written descriptions, I chose not to use any extracts from the article in this document in order to protect his identity. As the focus of this study is the description of wonder in a clinical context, participants would invariably need to draw on their own client work. They were reminded in the participant information sheet of their responsibility to maintain their own client confidentiality.

### **3.5.4 Ethics and Mediated Technology**

As I used Skype to conduct all but one of the participant interviews, there were specific ethical considerations involved (Saumure and Given, 2008; Palys and Atchinson, 2012). Firstly, I needed to ensure that the computers (both my own and those of the participants) were in locations which protected confidentiality. Secondly, as Anthony (2004) suggests, internet technologies have the potential for increasing disclosure among users. I was therefore attentive to the possibility that participants might have felt more disinhibited and disclosed more than they may have felt comfortable with due to using face-to-face internet technology. This was especially the case as they were all at home, where I assumed they felt most comfortable. At the end of each interview, as a debriefing process, I therefore checked with participants regarding how they had felt about the process. If our discussion had moved outside of their clinical experience whether they were still happy for me to work with the material they had provided.

### **3.5.5 Data Storage**

All data was taken offline as soon as possible. Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed files transferred to an encrypted USB stick for storage. Files were deleted from the recorder. The encrypted USB stick was then stored in a locked cabinet. All information will be kept at least until six months after I graduate, and will be treated as confidential. Data is stored according to the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

Van Manen (1990) does not offer a prescriptive method for research. Instead, he suggests that the researcher should draw on and adapt methods as necessary, in response to the phenomenon under investigation. An initial pilot study with one participant (John) trialed the data collection methods described in this chapter. They were sufficiently experience-rich to suggest the appropriateness of my approach. The richness of John's description and meaning-making led me to include his data in the main body of the findings.

In the process of this study, I generated three research texts to understand the lived experience of wonder in a clinical setting.

1. A research journal which included my own lived experience descriptions of wonder.
2. Written descriptions by all participants of their lived experiences of wonder in a clinical context.
3. Transcripts of the interview conversations which further developed reflection on the participants' written experiences.

#### **3.6.1 Researcher Journal and Lived Experience Descriptions**

A central aspect of interpretative phenomenology is Heidegger's concept of how pre-understanding is integral to our encounter with a phenomenon. Pre-understanding cannot simply be bracketed out, but is embedded in our meaning-making. Phenomenological reduction in the hermeneutic paradigm thus involves becoming conscious of our pre-understandings, not to place them aside, but to become aware of how they shape our interpretations. In effect they become the starting point from which the enquiry begins. If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already "know", we might find that presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections without awareness (van Manen, 1990, p.47). Heuristic, self-reflexive methods give us access to such presuppositions (Moustakas, 1990; Etherington, 2004). The hermeneutic arc in this project was the dialogue between my self-understandings of wonder and my understanding of participant experience.

In the early stages of research, I journaled to describe both my fore-knowledge and lived experiences of wonder. I structured my reflections by using the heuristic methods of focussing, indwelling and phenomenological writing suggested by van Manen (1990, pp.64-65). My journal writing detailed:

- The process of shaping a research question.
- Three experiences of wonder as I lived through them.
- Describing the experiences from the inside.
- Attending to how my body felt as well as spatial, temporal and relational dimensions.

Only when I had completed this initial self-reflexive phase did I consider recruiting participants. See Appendix 7 for extracts from my research journal, including examples of my own lived experience descriptions of wonder

### 3.6.2 Participant Written Lived Experience Descriptions

Handy and Ross (2005, p.40) have pointed out that although qualitative research is an expanding field there is an “almost unacknowledged assumption” that the best data can only be obtained through in-depth interviews. They suggest that semi-structured written accounts of experience can also provide highly focussed, descriptively rich, reflective data. Making a similar argument, van Manen emphasises the contribution that written accounts of experience can bring to research. By externalising subjective or inter-subjective awareness and distancing us from our “immediate lived involvements with the things in our world” (van Manen 1990, p.125), writing promotes the reflective attitude which is integral to hermeneutic phenomenology. As the words are externalised on paper, “our objectified thinking now stares back at us” (*ibid.*). Outlining this textual reflection, van Manen (1990, pp.127-129) describes how writing:

- Separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know.
- Distances us from the lifeworld, yet also draws us more closely to the lifeworld.
- De-contextualises thought from practice and yet returns thought to praxis.
- Abstracts our experience of the world, yet also concretises our understanding of the world.
- Objectifies thought into print and yet subjectifies our understanding of something that truly engages us.

Creating an opportunity to engage in such reflective practice was the motivation behind my invitation to participants to write their own lived experience descriptions.

Whilst acknowledging the challenges inherent in describing wonder, this research was grounded in the assumption that we know what it is to wonder and how to access it as an experience. In helping participants describe the actual relationship of wonder to their work, I drew, for a conceptual framework, on Kingwell's (2000) depiction of the foundational role wonder played in the development of Husserl's phenomenology. In his article, Kingwell (2000, p.89) argues that:

What is wonderful, for Husserl ... is this experience of wondering itself and myself as the person in whom astonishment before the world is felt. Wonder invites not only investigation of the world, but also reflection on the subject who experiences it, and on the experience itself ... “wonder” is all together the experience of wonder, the world it points to ... and the subject who feels the astonishment.

Husserl (1960) thus describes wonder as a three-fold structure: the *wonderer*, the *wonderful* and *wondering* as the relation between the two. In inviting participants to consider their experience of wonder I used this framework by suggesting they were free to:

1. Describe their experience of wonder in the aspect of being in the presence of their client who strikes them as *wonderful*.
2. Describe the experience of being open to wonder as a *wonderer*.
3. Describe wonder through their experience of *wondering* about their client. In this aspect wondering serves a relational function between them self and the client.

Following guidelines in my Participants Information Sheet (See Appendix 4), I invited participants to write their own account of a specific, concrete experience of wonder in a clinical context. I suggested they should pick a time when they were relaxed and focussed and write spontaneously, without concern about punctuation or grammar, in response to the following question:

*Describe an experience you have had of wonder which occurred in a clinical setting. The experience can have occurred as you prepared for the client's arrival, whilst working with the client or immediately after the session.*

The aims of this initial written exercise were threefold: firstly, to access (as far as possible) participants' experience of wonder; secondly to generate an initial research text on the phenomena of wonder; thirdly to establish emergent "themes" for each participant which I could then use to help me invite further description during the interview.

### **3.6.3 Interviews**

In my instructions for the written description, I had guided participants towards a pre-reflective experiential account of wonder rather than inviting them to tell me *about* an experience. Van Manen (2014, p.317) argues that there are two types of interviews: the phenomenological interview which "is used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential material" (*ibid.*) and the hermeneutic interview, which "aims for exploring the ways that fundamental phenomenological notions and methods can be understood". In order to stay in this experiential field, my priority was to approach interviewing participants phenomenologically. Thus, I stayed close to the phenomenon as they lived through it. I avoided asking for views, opinions, and interpretations and if I suspected a participant was beginning to generalise, I was prepared to ask a question which would bring the conversation back to the level of concrete experience. As phenomenological practitioners, all participants were very comfortable staying with concrete and experiential, so this was rarely necessary.

The interviews offered an opportunity to verify my understanding of the participants' written description and collaborate: "in the attempt to interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in the light of the original phenomenological question" (van Manen, 1990, p.84). The interviews also offered opportunities for participants to describe any other experiences of wonder in their clinical work. My intention was for my participants and myself to enter a dialogical reflection on the question of: "Is this what the experience of wonder is like for you?"

The process of interviewing was to foster the development of a “conversational relationship” through in-depth mutual discovery of the phenomena of wonder in which: “the interviewee becomes the co-investigator of the study” (van Manen, 1990, p.98). Any unscripted questions, prompts and interjections emerged through my use of empathic listening and focussing to foster a space in which participants were able to translate knowing into telling and in which I was able to begin understanding the meanings being revealed. In their discussion of reliability in interpretative psychological research, Churchill *et al.* (1998, p.66) describe the process of empathic listening, which as a psychotherapist is a skill I have developed in my therapy work and which I employed in my interviewing of participants:

In the employment of intense interest, the researcher listens to every nuance of a subject’s self-presentation with the aim of sensing possible significations. Single words or phrases open up constellations of meaning. This is perhaps best described as a kind a *fascination*. As one becomes more and more absorbed in the world of the subject, there is a loosening of the hold on one’s own world; the researcher thus begins to “inhabit” the existential field of the subject.

This sense of concentrated focussing and disciplined fascination guided my research attitude during the data collection and analysis phases.

Debriefing participants occurred at the end of the interview, when I invited each of them to reflect on and share with me the experience of the research in an “interactive summing up” (Finlay, 2011, p.224). They each had my contact details and information about where they could seek professional support, in the unlikely event that the interview process might prove to be distressing or uncomfortable for them.

All but one of the interviews were conducted via Skype. Although using internet mediated research results in the potential loss of direct embodied relationality, the ability for the participant and myself to see each other meant we were able to respond to each other’s body language to some degree. Whilst I made notes of paralinguistic cues and non-verbal dimensions of communication at the time, and included them in my transcript data, I only used audio-only recording to protect anonymity and so participants did not feel self-conscious about camera presentation. One of the participants (Tony) had difficulties with the technological aspect of Skype, so on the day of the interview I used the Skype-to-Phone facility only. We agreed at the start to assess during the interview whether this medium was working in terms of facilitating sufficient depth of enquiry. The single face-to-face interview with Ruben enabled me to reflect on whether the technologically-mediated nature of most of the interviews, and the fact that one of the interviews was conducted without video, compromised in any way the evocation of wonder. I discuss this in chapter six. All technologically-mediated interviews lasted between fifty to sixty minutes. The single face-to face co-present interview lasted the longest, at seventy-five minutes.



### 3.7 Data Analysis Methods

Churchill *et al.* (1998, p.65) have described how: “the phenomenological approach requires that the researcher enters into direct, personal contact with the psychological event being studied”. The first stage of analysis therefore involved my “empathic dwelling” with the participants’ descriptions in order to resonate and attune myself to their “position within the situation described” (*ibid.*). In their commentary on methods of data analysis in van Manen’s research approach, Ajjawi and Higgs (2007, p.622) propose the centrality of empathic listening:

The researcher remains open to questions that emerge from studying the phenomenon and allows the text to speak; the answer is then to be found in the text ... Understanding emerges in the process of dialogue between the researcher and the text of the research. The act of interpretation itself represents a gradual convergence of insight on the part of the researcher and the text.

From the hermeneutic dialogue I enacted with my research texts, I began the process of isolating thematic statements. These thematic parts were, however, always seen in relationship to the whole text and an emergent understanding of wonder. A theme for van Manen is not a thing, a conceptual formulation or a categorical statement. A theme is not an object one encounters at certain moments in the text, but rather “the experience of focus, of meaning, of point” (van Manen, 1990, p.87).

Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. It is by the light of these themes that we can navigate and explore such universes. Themes have phenomenological power when they allow us to proceed with phenomenological descriptions. (*ibid.*, p.84)

Phenomenological themes are understood as the *structures of experience*. In order to reveal experiential structures making up the participants’ descriptions of wonder, I looked for themes which related to what was *universal* (the general meaning which can be derived) and the *particular* (the meaning for the participants in a specific context) (Langdridge, 2007 p.123).

I isolated thematic statements from both the written descriptions and interview transcripts using two different approaches described by van Manen (1990, p.93). In analysing the lived experience description, I used a *detailed or line-by-line approach* and in analysing the interview transcripts I used a *selective or highlighting approach*. It is important to note that at the analysis stage not only the participants’, but my own personal ‘horizons’ were reflexively taken into account and recorded in both a column alongside the transcripts and in my research journal.

As outlined in an earlier part of this chapter, I have aimed to balance the thematic structure of wonder with the textural quality of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants in this study. Todres (2007, p.11) suggests that the message for phenomenologists may be to use language in a way that communicates “the mood of a situation or experience”. Drawing on readings of Heidegger’s later writings, which propose that the mood of wonder is perhaps best communicated through poetic discourse, and responding to the evocative, metaphorical nature of the language used by my participants in their descriptions, as a final stage of analysing individual participant data I utilised Glesne’s (1997) method of poetic transcription. This process is described in detail below. Staying

phenomenologically pliable to the things themselves (Ohlen, 2003, p.559), this stage of analysis was not one I had originally planned to undertake, but after the slightly distancing process of highlighting themes, poetic transcription facilitated a re-connection or closeness to the texture of the individual's experience.

### **Summary of Methods of Analysis**

1. Hermeneutic self-reflection
  - Ongoing and recorded in research journal.
2. Written lived experience descriptions (van Manen, 1990, 2014).
  - Initial condensation to identify concreteness of phenomenon of wonder.
  - Line-by-line analysis.
3. Interview.
  - Highlighting approach (Hycner, 1985 and van Manen, 1990, 2014).
4. Poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997).
  - Written lived experience descriptions and interview data.
5. Thematic analysis across participants (van Manen, 1990, 2014).

#### **3.7.1 Hermeneutic Self-Reflection**

Acknowledging that the interpretative process is invariably shaped by the values, beliefs and prior understandings of the researcher, I committed to ongoing self-reflection throughout the data analysis phase of this project. Research journal entries describing, for example, my experiences of inhabiting the field of my participant followed immediately after each interview, while the felt-sense was still in my awareness. I continued to trace my own experience as I listened to each interview several times before transcribing, paying attention to the non-verbal and para-linguistic levels of communication – intonations, pauses, emphases. Approaching the written descriptions and interview transcriptions, I adopted a style of reductive thinking characterised by openness and bracketing my common interpretations, pre-understandings, interpretive frameworks, theories and private feelings. However, I needed to be reflexive as part of becoming aware of what I needed to bracket. My intention was to be in an attitude of wonder at the experience each participant described. Examples of this heuristic-reduction from my journal are included in Appendix 8.

#### **3.7.2 Written Descriptions: The Detailed or Line-by-Line Approach**

The main contribution to this study of the participant's written description was that they enabled me to understand the phenomenon of wonder in a singular concrete example (van den Berg, 1955). Choosing to edit some of the words in these examples is, as van Manen (2014) acknowledges, a potentially controversial action in the research process. Whilst rewriting the words of a participant in feminist narrative or ethnographic research would be epistemologically problematic, phenomenology

aims at “fictionalizing a factual, empirical or already fictional account in order to arrive at a more plausible description of a possible human experience” (*ibid.*, p.256). In justifying the epistemological ground for “re-wording what people say” (Todres and Galvin 2008, p.569) in their own aesthetically informed phenomenological research, Todres and Galvin argue that it is not only the words of the participants that they aim to convey, but “the evocative happenings that the words signify” (*ibid.*, p.572). At this early stage, I re-worked each written description according to the suggestions given by van Manen (2014) to evoke more strongly the lived experience of wonder (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Van Manen’s guidelines for editing and honing an anecdote*

(van Manen, 2014, p.256)

- Remain constantly oriented to the lived experience of the phenomenon.
- Edit the factual content but do not change the phenomenological content.
- Enhance the eidetic or phenomenological theme by strengthening it.
- Aim for the text to acquire strongly embedded meaning.
- When a text is written in the present tense, it can make an anecdote more vocative.
- Use of personal pronouns tends to pull the reader in.
- Extraneous material should be omitted.
- Search for words that are “just right” in exchange for awkward words.
- Avoid generalising statements.
- Avoid theoretical terminology.
- Do not rewrite or edit more than absolutely necessary.
- Maintain the textual features of an anecdote as described above.

Editing the text to an anecdote offered me the opportunity to potentially reveal the phenomenon more strongly. It needs courage and the ability to take responsibility for the editing. An example of both texts are contained in Appendix 9, together with my research diary entry on the choices I made in editing.

Having edited the participant’s written lived experience description, I began a second stage of analysis. I re-read the edited description several times while asking the question: “*What does this*

sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the experience of wonder being described?” (van Manen, 1990, p.93). Analysing the edited text line by line, I identified sentences or phrases which were especially vivid or seemed thematic of the experience of wonder. I isolated and removed these highlighted sections from the main body of the text and placed them in the order they occurred as units of thematic meaning (for an example, see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Example of stage one analysis: lived experience description

<b>Extract from Written Lived Experience</b> <b>Description: John</b>	<b>Line-by-Line Thematic Analysis Stage 1</b>
I see myself looking at this lady, I notice how I feel. (1) There is a pressure in my chest that is building. (2) A similar pressure is developing behind my eyes (3). I feel sad and equally didn't want to cry. (4) I notice this and wonder if the client feels the same (5), so I ask her (6) trying not to interrupt the process too (7).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When I look at the lady I notice how I feel.</li> <li>2. There is a pressure building in my chest.</li> <li>3. There is a similar pressure developing behind my eyes.</li> <li>4. I feel sad yet don't want to cry.</li> <li>5. I wonder if the client feels what I feel.</li> <li>6. I ask her how she feels.</li> <li>7. I try not to disturb the process.</li> </ol>

I then highlighted and clustered similar extracts together to create what I call a tentative thematic statement, which I understand not as a concept but as a meaningful phrase. For an example of this process, see Figure 3. For full text and analysis of this lived experience description see Appendix 8.

As described in the earlier section on data collection, these thematic statements generated my understanding of the participant's written description of wonder, which I drew on to partly shape my initial engagement in the interview. This documentation process enabled me to: “show not only how each one is thematic of the phenomenon but to present a decision trail through the data that illustrates the process of revelation” (Rapport, 2005, p.135). See Appendix 9 for examples from research journal showing such a “decision trail”.

Figure 3: Example of clustering units of meaning into thematic statements

Tentative thematic Statement	Unit of meaning
One: Sensing Self (Emotional)	1. When I look at the lady I notice how I feel.  4. feel sad yet don't want to cry.  8. I pay attention to what I feel.  14. I return to myself in the therapy room.  19. Sensing self.
Two: Sensing Self (Physical)	2. There is a pressure building in my chest.  3. There is a similar pressure developing behind my eyes.  31. There is a sense of sadness.  32. There is a sense of lightness.  33. My curiosity subsides into a more relaxed and satisfied state.  43. I feel tired and content.
Three: Sensing the Other	6. I ask her how she feels.  10. I attempt to enter her world.  11. I want to experience what she experiences.  16. I have to live the client's experience to some degree.  18. Stepping into the experience

### 3.7.3 Interview Transcripts: Selective or Highlighting Approach

To analyse the transcribed interview data, I used a combination of Hycner's (1985) phenomenological analysis and van Manen's (1990, p.94) *selective or highlighting approach*. Each participant's data was subjected to the same procedure

#### Stage One

This involved reading each interview transcript individually several times and moving slowly through the data asking: "What statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described?" (van Manen, 1990, p.93). This corresponds with the process Hycner describes of delineating units of meaning, which he defines as: "those words, phrases, non-verbal or

paralinguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows” (1985, p.282). Unlike Hycner, who recommends identifying all units of general meaning as well as units of meaning which correspond specifically to the phenomenon, I followed van Manen’s guidelines in highlighting only those phrases or statements which for me evoked an aspect of the structures of the experience of wonder. These units of meaning were placed in the right-hand margin in the order in which they occurred (see Figure 4 for an example of this process).

Figure 4: Example of identifying units of meaning from interview data

Reflexive Comments	Extract from Transcript of Interview  With John	Selective Thematic Analysis Stage 1  Units of meaning which relate to the lived- experience of wonder
<p><i>I notice that I have leapt straight into the central theme of his writing: “Attunement” – I wonder how will this focused opening will shape the subsequent interview?</i></p> <p><i>I am really aware of how John is groping his way</i></p>	<p>R1: John, if I’ve got it right, you had a strong sense of wonder as attunement ... and a relational flow between being in your own grounding in yourself and opening up to the other.</p> <p>J1: Yes it was a mixture ... it was a mixture of ... interesting you say that ... I think it was very active (1)</p> <p>R2: Active</p> <p>J2: Active</p> <p>R3: Yes</p> <p>J3: Wonder to start off ...I t was kind of like putting myself into the space of wonder (2) ... erm ... or somehow facilitating that</p> <p>R4: Mmm</p> <p>J4: But then actually being taken over (3) by that process of attunement (4) and by kind of creating that space (5) and that ... you know ... vulnerability (6) erm then noticing you know, paying attention to what I am feeling (7) and working with the client in a way where there is a movement between what I am experiencing</p>	<p><b>1. It was very active.</b></p> <p><b>2. Putting himself into that space of wonder.</b></p> <p><b>3. Being taken over.</b></p> <p><b>4. A process of attunement.</b></p> <p><b>5. Creating that space.</b></p> <p><b>6. A sense of vulnerability.</b></p> <p><b>7. Paying attention to what he is feeling.</b></p> <p><b>8. There is a movement between himself and other: what is being felt and experienced, noticing that, stepping back and checking with the client.</b></p>

<i>into articulating his experience. I feel a knot of anxiety ... is it going to be possible to come as close to wonder as I hope? Have I asked the impossible here?</i>	and feeling and noticing that and stepping back from that and also checking with the client (8) and asking what he is feeling and asking him to describe what is going on ... It is very much a movement. (9)	<b>9. It is very much a movement.</b>
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(For the full transcript of the interview, with John see Appendix 10)

## Stage Two

My next step was to cluster together the units of meanings as experienced and described by each participant to form tentative themes to which I gave provisional descriptive titles (Hycner, 1985, p.287). Hycner has observed that the clustering process “obviously requires some kind of ‘judgement call’ on the part of the researcher” (1985, p.284). Quoting Colaizzi, he argues that the phenomenological researcher is: “engaged in something which cannot be precisely delineated. For here he is involved in that ineffable thing known as creative insight” (Hycner p 288). Through a consistent reflective engagement and openness to the data, together with a commitment to bracketing my presuppositions, my intention was to make transparent my “subjective judgements.” (ibid.) (See left- hand column of Figure 4.) Dialogue with my research supervisor alerted me to presuppositions I was not aware of. See Figure 5 for an example of themes generated for one participant.

Figure 5: Example of stage two: clustering of units of meaning for John

<b>Thematic Statement:</b> <b>There is an experience of stepping into the space of wonder</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was very active (1).</li> <li>• Putting myself in the space of wonder (2).</li> <li>• Creating that space (5).</li> <li>• First there is the adopting an attitude of wonder (22).</li> <li>• There is a creating of the space in the first place or allowing that space or listening out for that space (24).</li> <li>• An active process (25).</li> <li>• Then stepping into it (26).</li> <li>• Consciously electing to put myself into a certain stance and losing myself in the wonder whilst hearing and feeling what is going on. And then there is a shift out of that (33).</li> <li>• Generating that feeling (53).</li> <li>• One way of curiosity is to change the space and the way of relating (56).</li> <li>• One is an approach – shifting the space from chatter and noise to actual connection: being</li> </ul>

with. One is about what is going on (63).

### Stage Three

This involved immersing myself in the hermeneutic process by dwelling with these highlighted themes (see Figure 6 for an example) within the context of the bigger picture of the whole transcript. In doing so, I allowed the deeper and more evocative essences of each participant's lived experience of wonder to reveal themselves. In particular, I engaged in a process of imaginative variation – considering each provisional theme in turn and asking the question: *“Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete the theme from the phenomenon? Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?”* (van Manen, 1990, p.107). Essential themes, as distinct from incidental themes, were those which I determined if they were missing from the final description of the phenomena of wonder, for this individual would mean the description was incomplete and would lack resonance.

Figure 6: Example of stage three: list of emergent themes

#### John

1. There is an experience of stepping into the space of wonder.
2. There is a sense of being in wonder.
3. Wonder has a quality of feeling lost or losing myself.
4. Wondering is experienced hesitantly.
5. To be in wonder is to be open to vulnerability.
6. An aspect of wonder is being curious.
7. Wonder involves an attunement to self
8. Wonder both facilitates and is experienced as an embodied attunement to the other.
9. Wonder is experienced as a flowing, cyclical movement.
10. Wonder has the texture and quality of breath.
11. In wonder there is a movement from embodied awareness to consciousness and then cognition.
12. Wonder is both a co-created phenomenon and the means by which something new is co-created
13. In wonder there is passion, a deep interest in the other.
14. In wonder there is desire, will, wanting.
15. Wonder is a shared experience.
16. Wonder is ineffable.
17. Wonder exists in the space in-between.



### 3.7.4 Poetic Transcription

Given that communicating wonder has often been the preserve of the artist or poet, it is perhaps no wonder that I turned to poetic language to help me not only come closer to understanding the data, but also to evoke these understandings in my presentation of the data. Responding to what they see as a movement towards an “aesthetic phenomenology that exercises more evocative and poetic forms of writing”, Todres and Galvin (2008, p.568) describe their challenge to “find words that are faithful to the phenomenon in all its complexity, sense and texture” (*ibid.*, p.569). I also struggled to find language that would invoke the ineffability of wonder in both “style and content” (van Manen 1999, p.206). This was a struggle I shared with all the participants in this study. While I looked for themes, I was also attentive to the fact that each description carried distinctive image or concepts. Van Manen (2014, p.252) describes these incidents as examples of “*punctum*”, which he understands as “a detail that stirs me”.

Earlier, I quoted from Keats’ poem *Lamia*, where he cautions philosophers against dissecting the rainbow and so lose its wonder. I was concerned that dissecting each lived experience into parts which then become subsumed with the experience of others might be the precise action which, rather than disclosing wonder, in fact dispels it. For me, to simply use language “in rigorous, precise and rational ways to show the boundaries of experienced phenomenon” (Todres and Galvin, 2008, p.569) was to risk losing the texture of wonder in the analytical process. In accordance with the hermeneutic principle of moving between the parts and the whole (van Manen, 1990), I therefore sought an expressive, poetic dimension of enquiry to enhance my understanding of the texture and thematic meanings of each participant’s lived experience of wonder before bringing this into dialogue with others. Glesne (1997, p.206) clearly articulates how she addressed this challenge in her own research through a process she calls “poetic transcription”:

Analytical writing breaks up interview transcriptions and observation field notes into component parts, imposing a researcher-perceived order on things. It requires data reduction and segregation of thoughts. Poetic transcription is also filtered through the researcher but involves word reduction while illuminating the wholeness and interconnections of thoughts ... I found myself, through poetic transcription, searching for the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures and then drawing from all portions of the interviews to juxtapose details into a somewhat abstract representation.

Recognising that in qualitative research meaning is created dialogically, Todres and Galvin (2008, p.571) also look to the poetic as a way for the researcher to evoke the uniqueness of the individual’s lived experience, as well as: “the shared intersubjective horizons within which any unique experience occurs”. Researchers who uses poetic language, they suggest, become “evocative mediators” who “offer the ‘between’ of intersubjective space” (*Ibid.*).

This perspective is echoed by Ohlen (2003, p.559), who performs “a poetic condensation” on his own research data and observes that poetic expression has frequently been drawn upon as a method of both deepening interpretation in phenomenological and narrative research, and giving expression to the in-between of researcher-participant intersubjectivity. Etherington, for example, describes how

arranging the transcript of one interview in stanza form was a way of valuing the: “messiness, depth and texture of experienced life ... no other representation could capture the quality of our conversation” (2004, p.213). Describing her research into the lived experience of a single participant, Glesne (1997, p.206) argues that the poeticising of interview data enabled her to not only: “make sense of the data but also ... use Dona Juana’s words to convey the emotions that the interviews evoked in [her].”

Just as I drew on van Manen’s ideas for guidance when editing written descriptions to evoke more strongly the singularity of the phenomenon of wonder for each individual participant, Glesne provided a guiding set of “rules” to facilitate my adopting a systematic procedure of poeticising. These guidelines enabled me to come closer to my participants’ experience of wonder, as well as finding a style of representation to convey the open, evocative nature of the phenomenon itself.

The first stage involved focussing on one participant’s words at a time. I read all my journal notes, listened again to the interview tape and read the written descriptions and transcripts. I paid particular attention at this stage to moments of “*punctum*” (van Manen, 2014, p.252), and where I had experienced a sense of wonder in response to their experiences. Being careful to remain congruent with the essential themes I had identified, I pulled passages and images together creating a concentrated piece of prose. Whilst I stayed close to their words, changing only tenses and personal pronouns, I felt free to re-order extracts from anywhere in the written text and interview transcript to produce a synthesising piece of prose. While there is undoubtedly a poetic dimension to the language of these prose descriptions I developed, I decided to take the process a stage further by creating a more formal poetic structure. Adapting the three “rules” outlined by Glesne (1997, p.207), I poetically condensed these initial responses to each participant in turn:

1. The words in the poetic transcriptions are the participant’s not mine.
2. I could pull the participant’s phrases from anywhere in the transcript or written description and juxtapose them.
3. I would keep enough of the participant’s words together to re-present their individual speaking rhythm.

I used all the words contained in the prose but broke open the sentences to emphasise images and ideas and create a sense of rhythm that captured the movement of the participant’s wondering or experience of being struck by wonder. Hycner (1993, pp.119-120) suggests such disclosing of the poetic is in fact the work of the psychotherapist who wonders:

Each person is like a poem waiting to be released. The psychotherapist must resonate to the unique rhythm and rhyme of this nascent art form. Frequently, this poem has been hidden by years of tortured and wretched experiences. It requires much loving openness for the beautiful to emerge. Genuine poetry cannot be forced into a meter not its own.

These poetic transcriptions of data offered me a powerfully evocative reminder of each participant’s experience as I moved through the subsequent process of analysis, and before their particular

nuance and tone was woven into discussion of the experiences of the whole. See Appendix 11 for an example of this poetic transcription process.

### 3.7.5 Cross Participant Analysis

Once all the interviews had been individually analysed for emergent themes, and poetically transcribed to retain a holistic sense and textural dimension, I began the process of bringing the individual experiences into dialogue with each other. My approach to generating themes from the experiences of all eight participants was essentially the same as that which I had taken for the individual data.

**Stage One:** There were in total 158 emergent provisional themes expressing the clustered units of meaning across all eight participants (see Appendix 12). Through an immersive phase of reading and re-reading, progressive coding, categorising and re-ordering I sought to connect themes from one interview with resonant themes in other interviews. Again, using a process of imaginative variation I wondered whether – if a theme were missing – it would mean the final interpretation of wonder would be incomplete, and ensuing descriptions would lack resonance. I eventually distilled the cumulative list into forty-three themes containing the experiences which I determined carried the essential qualities of what it was for this group of existential psychotherapists to experience wonder with their clients.

**Stage Two:** The next stage involved determining if these forty-three themes could be clustered further. Whilst some themes were present in all participants' experiences of wonder, I was careful not to discard a theme which emerged in only one or two descriptions. Returning periodically to the "whole" of the poetic transcriptions and interview transcripts enabled me to stay connected to the fact that these singular elements were perhaps an essential aspect of a participant's experience, and might in fact offer an important dimension to understanding the phenomenon more generally. In short, whilst aspects which were experienced by all participants may indicate an essence, a phenomenological perspective also acknowledges individual differences.

**Stage Three:** Via this process of progressively clustering, and delineating which aspects conveyed most clearly the experience of wonder described by these eight participants, three overarching themes containing eight sub-themes emerged from the original thematic list (see Appendix 12). These are the themes around which I structured subsequent discussion.

All human experience is complex and excessive, but wonder as a phenomenon - in particular - defies definition. Thus, I found that wonder did not fit neatly into my systematic categorisation. When reflecting on the themes from the list of forty-three which were not included in these three main clusters, it became clear to me that they all related to how the participants experienced the main three themes in terms of temporality, spatiality and embodiment (see Appendix 13). Embracing this lack of containment, which seemed to be indicative of the phenomenon of wonder itself, I wove these existential elements through my subsequent descriptions of the main themes.

As I engaged in this slow process of dwelling with and clustering themes, I kept re-reading the extracts from the participants written and interview descriptions that gave expression to these themes. I frequently returned to the poetic transcriptions. In this way, I ensured that whilst working towards understanding the experience of wonder in a clinical context described by this group of participants, I was continuously reminded of the evocative presence of the individual experiences which offered variations within the theme or important counterpoints (Hycner, 1985, p.291). Ongoing supervisory dialogue throughout this analytical process facilitated critical reflection on the choices I was making.

### **3.8 Phenomenological Reduction**

Phenomenology is the method by which we can “break-through” (van Manen 2014, p.215) the taken-for-grantedness which Husserl termed the “natural attitude” of lived-experience to a place where we can explore previously-hidden layers and depths of existence. The central components of Husserl’s phenomenological method, by which this “break-through” occurs, were the interconnected concepts of *epoché* and reduction. A fuller exploration of the ways in which these concepts were continuously revised by Husserl, and subsequently taken up and adapted by others, is beyond the remit of this thesis. At the most fundamental level, the *epoché* is the moment in which ready-made opinions are temporarily suspended or bracketed. It is the way we open ourselves to the world without preconceptions. The reduction is the methodological term used to describe the ways in which our attention then turns towards the phenomenon as it is revealed in awareness – what Merleau-Ponty calls “the spontaneous surge of the life-world” (cited in van Manen, 2014, p.220). The *epoché*-reductive attitude of phenomenology is an “invitation to openness” (*ibid.*, p.222) in which we seek to make contact with lived experience.

In later chapters, I describe how *epoché* (in terms of openness) and reduction (in terms of revelation) are themselves disclosed as structures of the lived experience of wonder. In this section, I briefly outline their *methodological* function in eliciting a “break-through”, gaining access to and disclosing of the pre-reflective lived experience of wonder in the clinical practice of my participants. In structuring my reflection, I draw on six categories of the *epoché* and reductive methods described by van Manen (2014, pp.222-239). The first four he describes as being “preparatory elements of the reduction proper” (p.222).

- *The heuristic epoché-reduction.* This is the experience of bracketing our natural attitude, which is most effectively performed through the experience of wonder. My approach from the outset of this study, and described in earlier sections of this document, was to be open to wonder and wondering as a research method.
- *The hermeneutic epoché-reduction.* To bracket the presumptions and prior understandings which would prevent my being open to the phenomenon of wonder, as it was described in this research, required a high level of critical self-reflection. Initial heuristic description of my own experiences, and commitment to an ongoing reflective practice, in terms of research journaling and supervisory dialogue, created spaces to make explicit and question my own structures of meaning which might threaten to silence the particular call of wonder arising through this study.
- *The experiential epoché-reduction.* By staying close to the concrete lived experience of participants in the written descriptions and the interviews, my intention was to “suspend abstractions” (van Manen, 2014 p.225) and bracket all theoretical meaning making. I feel that a particular strength of this study is the degree to which the participants and I were able to stay focussed on the immediacy of the lived experience of wonder, rather than being drawn into conceptual considerations.
- *The methodological epoché-reduction.*  
According to van Manen (2014), the methodological reduction is the bracketing of research techniques in order to devise a methodological approach which is appropriate to the phenomenon being investigated (p.226). The importance of the phenomenological researcher adopting an attitude of wonder has been well argued (Finlay and Evans, 2009; Hansen, 2012; Lobo-Guerrero, 2012; Loyttyniemi, 2005; van Manen, 1996, 2014). Van Manen (2014, p.27) in particular states that: “Phenomenological research begins with wonder at what gives itself and how something gives itself. It can only be pursued while surrendering to a state of wonder.” When the phenomenon under investigation is wonder itself, this surrender becomes integral to the methodology (Hansen 2012; Hycner 1996). I suggest that in terms of methodology, this study has been wonder-filled in a number of ways:
  - i) Wonder called me to adopt a fundamentally reflexive stance, maintaining an ongoing self-awareness of what I was conceptually bringing to the research process. This process was recorded in my research journals and discussed in detail in a later chapter on reflexivity.
  - ii) During the interviews I orientated myself to an open stance by drawing on dialogical approaches from my psychotherapeutic practice which fostered empathic attunement (Finlay, 2015, p.54) and the phenomenological process of horizontalisation (van Deurzen and Adams, 2011, p.50). This kept me close to my participants’ experience and lessened the possibility of shaping the direction of the dialogue with my own

agendas. I describe this process and my relative success in staying open to my participants' lived experience in subsequent chapters.

- iii) To be in wonder as a researcher demanded that I maintain, as far as possible, a fundamental naivety about the experience being explored with my participants. This aspect posed two challenges. Firstly, an ongoing commitment to reflexivity ensuring my deep interest stayed focussed on what participants were bringing, rather than letting my own understandings of wonder emerge unchecked and shape the process. Secondly, I needed to be comfortable with being in a state of not-knowing, whilst maintaining overall containment of and responsibility for the research process. Examples of how wonder as unknowing manifested itself in my research process, and the challenges this posed, are described more fully in chapter six.
  - iv) What happens when wonder is foregrounded in research only became fully apparent during the process of interviewing participants. It was an intensely relational, co-creative, equalising process that again is revealed in the findings and discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.
  - v) Staying responsive and open to the phenomenon of wonder at the level of methodology led me to include a stage of analysis and re-presentation which I had not originally imagined. As the interviews progressed, I came to recognise that the ineffable and invitational qualities of wonder demanded an approach which was characterised by more openness and ambiguity than I had anticipated. The more evocative poetic transcriptions which emerged from this consideration I feel reveal a texture of individual experience which would otherwise have been lost.
- *The eidetic reduction.* The *eidios* are the internal meaning structures of a phenomenon. The process of dwelling with the emergent themes until patterns started to emerge, and asking whether the experience of wonder would be as resonant without a particular theme, were examples of how I performed a reductive process that brought the phenomenon into clearer focus.
  - *The originary reduction.* This final reduction has its roots in Heidegger's understanding of attunement to the originary moment of the phenomenon. "Heidegger speaks of a flash of insight that may happen as an appropriative event ... this event occurs when the truth of being reveals itself" (van Manen, 2014, p.235). Whilst Husserl sought for eidetic structure, Heideggerian originary reduction traces "emergent meanings and how a phenomenon originates and comes into being" (*ibid.*, p.236.) These are the moments of insight or spontaneous happenings which cannot be planned for in a methodological sense. Nevertheless, I suggest that my foregrounding wondering as a methodological approach facilitated "an inviting space" (Hansen 2012, p.15) for wonder to emerge. These were moments where my participants and I found ourselves in wonder during interviews, in our

frequent exclamations of revelation, and during the writing process, when I suddenly experienced a sense of flow and realised I had “captured” (or “been captured” by) wonder.

### **3.9 Ensuring Trustworthiness, Rigour and Validity**

Validating phenomenological research is a contentious issue (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine and Sambrook, 2010; Finlay, 2006; Rashott and Jenson, 2007; Rolfe, 2006). Not only is there a lack of consensus regarding the criteria by which phenomenological research should be judged, there is also an argument that the issue of validity itself is an imposition from a positivist paradigm, which is not compatible with phenomenological research (Sandelowski, 2004). Finlay (2006) argues that given the multiplicity of criteria by which their research could be judged, qualitative researchers should not leave evaluative comments to the end, but make explicit from the outset the specific evaluative criteria appropriate to the study. Morse *et al.* (2002) have similarly argued that rigour and trustworthiness are best achieved by ensuring that criteria for reliability are clearly part of the research design and thus woven into the fabric of the enquiry.

#### **3.9.1 Criteria for Validation**

In their evaluative schema, Henwood and Pigeon (1992) describe methods of establishing, rigour, trustworthiness and coherence which I regard as congruent with my proposed research design. Their seven criteria which provide a framework for these methods are principles against which, as I argue in chapter six, the quality of my study can be measured. These criteria are: keeping close to the data; ensuring theory is integrated at diverse levels of abstraction; reflexive awareness is maintained; a clear auditable paper trail of documentation is presented to account for the decisions taken; theoretical sampling and negative case analysis is incorporated; sensitivity to negotiated realities is maintained; transferability and relevance of the study is clear. I have also included an eighth criteria: *the artistic dimension* (Finlay, 2006) not described by Henwood and Pigeon (1992), but which I regard as highly relevant to this study.

#### **3.9.2 Participant Checking**

Participant checking and incorporation of new interpretation into the data is suggested by some researchers (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine and Sambrook, 2010; Doyle, 2007) as an important aspect of research validation, which takes into account negotiated realities. My decision not to invite participants to respond to my re-working of written descriptions, poetic transcriptions and thematic interpretation arose from an epistemological standpoint. Mc Connell-Henry, Chapman and Francis

(2011, pp.36-37) argue that even when researchers put aside pragmatic and ethical concerns, there is a fundamental incongruence between interpretative phenomenology and member-checking:

Phenomenology is not underpinned by the positivist need for 'right' answers – Heideggerian phenomenology aims to develop an empathic understanding that is cognisant of the multiple nature of truth and that context determines the meaning of the experience.

Although I rejected formal member-checking, I was still concerned that I had properly heard my participants' descriptions and understood the meanings they drew from their experiences. As we knew from the outset that there was no "safety net" (Mc Connell-Henry, Chapman and Francis, 2011, p.34) of additional interviews/communications, at the end of interviews I invited participants to reflect on whether they felt that: (a) I had understood them and/or (b) they had been able to express their experiences fully. As my approach to interviewing was phenomenological, my process involved paraphrasing and explicitly checking that I had understood meaning, as well as creating sufficient space for participants to express themselves. There are many examples throughout the interviews where participants challenged and corrected my assumptions and interpretations. All participants described their satisfaction with the interview, feeling they had expressed their experiences well and that they had been heard by me. One participant, for whom English was an additional language, said he did not think he could have described wonder better in his native language.



# CHAPTER FOUR: WONDROUS FINDINGS

## 4.0 Introduction

My intention throughout this dissertation has been to create a phenomenological text which both explicates and evokes the lived experience of wonder. Phenomenological enquiry requires the researcher to become more than an “epistemological bookkeeper” (Hansen, 2012 p.4) who systemizes and analyses data. The researcher is also called to develop sensitivity and give expression to the ineffable, excessive, affective qualities of the phenomenon. Van Manen has argued that this latter dimension is “the most neglected and ignored in the phenomenological literature” (2014, p.240).

In my methodology chapter I have described the reflexive and poetic approaches which I adopted in order to facilitate my receiving the more enigmatic at-the-edge-of-awareness, corporeal, spatial, temporal, relational kinds of knowing about wonder. One aspect of my analytical process involved thickening the language and silence of each participant’s written description and interview verbatim into a poetic transcription. Before presenting the themes which capture the more systemized structure of wonder which emerged within and across my data, I have chosen to place these (hopefully) evocative poetic transcriptions first.

In organising my representation of findings this way my intentions are three-fold. Firstly it emphasizes the texture and atmosphere of wonder which, as I have described in earlier chapters is a phenomenon which in its apprehension defies easy categorization. Secondly, I hope the poetic transcriptions enact what Hansen has termed “an inviting space” (2012, p.15) for the reader to enter the affective dimension of wonder not so easily captured and conveyed by theoretical abstraction and conceptualisation. Finally, by dwelling in the poetic transcriptions there is a particular calling to the psychotherapy professional. Wonder is not easy to grasp, so foregrounding such idiographic detail reveals the unique, distinctive quality of each participant’s experience within the particular context in which they initially emerged. The reader is invited to reflect on their own practice as they experience a closeness to the vivid and present moments of wonder participants experienced in their clinical work. In short, as well as evoking the affective dimension of wonder, the poetic transcriptions as holistic narratives are intended, in part, to attract reader’s attention who might be puzzled by what a concrete moment of wonder looks like in therapy. In this sense the poetic transcriptions act as a space of orientation towards psychotherapist lived experience before presenting more detailed thematic analysis.

## 4.1 PART ONE: Poetic Transcriptions - Horizons of Therapeutic Wonder

### 4.1.1 John: Wonder has the Texture of Breath

First there is adopting an attitude of wonder.  
It is kind of like putting myself  
into the space of wonder,  
or somehow facilitating that.  
Listening out for that space,  
I have this curiosity:  
“What is going on between us,  
what is being felt?”  
Wonder facilitates it  
by re-directing the space into  
perhaps, what I often imagine is being avoided.  
That’s our vulnerability, our feelings,  
a felt-sense that underpins a client in the room.

My curiosity is,  
are they even aware of anything underneath that?  
What is underneath that?  
What is it like for them?  
And if I was to ask them to attend to that feeling,  
rather than to talk about it,  
maybe they can actually connect with,  
what is going on for them in a way,  
which doesn’t,  
which isn’t threatening.

Then there comes a moment,  
I consciously elect to put myself into a certain stance  
And lose myself in the wonder.  
I feel lost.  
The feeling is of actually being taken over,  
by an attunement with my client.

I see myself looking at this lady,  
I notice how I feel.  
There is a pressure in my chest that is building,  
a similar pressure is developing,  
behind my eyes. I feel sad,  
and equally don’t want to cry.  
I notice this and wonder if the client feels the same,  
so I ask her,  
trying not to interrupt the process.

Our vulnerability, our feelings,  
a felt-sense. Is this me?  
Is this something I am familiar with or is this different?  
Is there a reason for this I am aware of?  
Or is this something that I am new to,  
and in the moment,  
perhaps shares some commonality with the other?  
I don’t know in this moment.  
It’s only by checking in,  
with another that I know really if this is,  
all about me,

or if this is something reflecting,  
maybe your experience of what is going on.  
And equally,  
what I don't know necessarily is if,  
what is happening for you,  
is actually a reflection of what is going on for me?  
So I start to co-create something.

It feels sort of fluid. It's a cyclical thing. It's iterative.  
I am consciously electing to put myself into a certain stance,  
losing myself in the wonder,  
whilst I hear and feel what is going on.  
And then there is a shift out of that,  
it's almost like a movement,  
between my thoughts and my body.  
And in my body I am feeling,  
within a moment of feeling something,  
I then become conscious of feeling it,  
In that consciousness I am languaging it.  
When I start to language it,  
I move into that cognitive space again.

There is something that happens with my breathing.  
The flow of breathing in, the movement of breathing,  
it's almost like a cursor, you know on your laptop,  
it's kind of like the flow of movement of my breath,  
positions my awareness.  
My felt-sense through my body,  
it's a movement, like a scan up and down,  
it relates to,  
the movement of my breath.  
Something like that.  
There is a movement to it, feels sort of fluid,  
My breath takes my awareness with it,  
You know.

Wonder has the texture, quality of my breath.  
When I am attending to myself,  
it's about my breathing in,  
and following the movement of my breath into something.  
When there is an attention on the other,  
there is very much a breathing,  
into the space in-between,  
as well as there is a breathing into myself.  
There is something about the quality and texture of breath,  
And the lightness of breath,  
That seems to shape the experience of wonder for me.

#### **4.1.2 Andreas: Wondering is an Invitation-Opening Space**

To be in a state of wondering is to know myself,  
Be present to myself and from this place,  
Be open to what my clients bring,  
I am open to receive everything.

Wondering is like taking a deep breath  
And waiting from there to, you know,  
Approve or not approve the invitation.

Like giving the space to the other person.

It's an invitation to be open because,  
you know that I would not judge you.  
I say the words: I wonder,  
How was it for you?

You feel more calm,  
You feel more secure,  
You feel more safe.  
Wonder is not easy as an emotional task.

### 4.1.3 Mia: Love-Filled Wonder

Wondering is a process of discovery,  
connected to my passion,  
in the form of curiosity.  
Love provides the proper context for wonder otherwise,  
it would turn the space into voyeurism.  
Love holds, love holds, I mean, I just think love holds,  
Love holds the space and allows,  
It then allows whatever to emerge.

Wonder is a possibility which lies at the backdrop of awareness.  
I am touched by wonder,  
I am led into something more, of my experience of the world.  
The moment of discovery, the moment of coming out,  
of some kind of puzzle or stuckness,  
and a sense of relief or release,  
the physical sense of release,  
the sort of coming into an opening,  
of understanding something, I couldn't understand before.

Understanding something at a deeper level,  
that wasn't available to me before.  
Some deeper experience.  
Deeper sense,  
of reconnection with the flow of life itself.  
In this moment of wonder it does not feel solidified in any way,  
You haven't moved from a stuck place,  
into a new place of holding something firm,  
There is a real openness in holding this new knowledge.

### 4.1.4 Jason: *Wonder Exists*

Suddenly and surprisingly,  
he expressed this to me at the door.  
It filled me with wonder and awe,  
and then I felt quite overwhelmed.  
It was that feeling that was part of the wonder,  
it made me realise, it was true.  
We have worked really hard and connected,  
This being filled with wonder,  
is followed by another part of the wonder,  
a felt-sense in the chest.

The lights go on, happiness, everything gels and connects,  
Space and separation disappear a little more.  
A feeling of suddenly being transported outwards,  
away from normal experience into something ecstatic,  
Euphoric! A peak experience,  
which in its illuminating, uplifting, elevating.  
Too much, Too strong, Overwhelming.  
I want others to share it too,  
I want to tell somebody, yes tell somebody,  
I want somebody else to feel it.  
Wonder exists.  
It's affirming, life affirming,  
life is not mundane and flat or meaningless.  
Magic exists.  
Fantasy and nonsense are actually real,  
and being played out in front of you.  
This deep connection exists,  
the theory is real, and the therapy is working.  
It was that that was part of the wonder as well.  
It made me realise, it was true.

#### **4.1.5 Ruben: A Mutual Encounter of Existence**

Wonder is a pre-verbal, embodied experience,  
of high concentration on the other.  
It is an expression of the experience of relationship,  
where we are both ready to co-create,  
a space for new territories, new experience, new phenomenon.  
All of a sudden there is an unexpected shift,  
and I am put in an authentic mode.  
I think here we go, now it begins,  
it is happening.

As I am experiencing wonder I step,  
into contact with something, someone, some experience,  
that lies outside of my cognitive structure.  
I don't even think about it, that's the point.  
I don't think, "Will I do it or not do it?"  
It is a flowing moment.  
My neo-cortex is switched off in this moment,  
I am a limbic system.  
There is a tingling feeling under my skin,  
and something comes out of myself from the inside,  
it expands from my inside to the outside.  
I feel the whole of my inside start to feel warmer,  
expanding.

The boundaries of my body aren't static,  
it is as if my being  
is getting a bit larger and expanding,  
it's a flowing, expanding feeling of energy,  
there is a sense of harmony.  
When I am in this space of wonder I feel highly alert,  
The antithesis of the mood of boredom  
I feel very alive,  
I am very interested in the other, they are very alive to me.

Not a thing – a person, so I am exactly not sure what is going to happen,  
I feel a sense of immediate necessity.  
If I can be brave to allow myself to be wondrous then I trust so much  
that I don't need to defend myself or protect myself,  
I can be in a space of child-like regressed wonder about existence.  
It is like a dance.  
Trust is the ground, the base from which  
I become interested and wondrous,  
about the other person or experience.  
And then, when there is enough trust to express my wonder  
I go on and on and deeper.  
In this space I am not fulfilling a role any longer,  
I am in an immediate, mutual encounter of existence.

#### **4.1.6 Tony: Epoché – A love Story**

There was a resignation on my part,  
that this is how it had to be.  
And then I am blown away,  
by this spontaneous experience of wonder.  
Curiosity lights up in me, interest moves my attention,  
feeling this wondering intellectually and physically.  
Silently she invites me into where she is and  
I am struck by a magical spectacle;  
the wonder outside the window.  
When I turn, I realize that I have been seen,  
in seeing her smile I can feel my own smile.  
This was a really solid feeling, a really solid experience,  
it makes us equal.

To know that, to realise that, to be in that space,  
that is the wonder.  
It was an upward movement that I know we both shared  
towards love and acceptance – not just for each other  
But a movement beyond, something bigger.  
It is an extra-ordinary, unusual and strong occurrence.  
This is a transcendent moment,  
in which all the dimensions of existence  
spontaneously come together and transformation occurs.  
There is an action, a new sense, a movement to a new state of being.  
A space was created in which something different,  
wonderful, fresh, unknowable but knowable erupted  
spontaneously, and in that I met a different person.  
And that enabled me to respond differently,  
not in a clinically cold way of,  
“Oh I can respond differently in this situation”  
but of a human being who has met another human being,  
and that is quite wonderful in itself.

#### **4.1.7 Dave: Wonder Orientates us to Connection**

Wonder orientates us to connection.  
In therapy, wonder is a gateway, a threshold experience,  
in which boundaries and constructs no longer exist.  
We are part of everything, we are all of one piece.  
The sacred I-Thou connection.  
Wonder keeps me connected like a child to the soma,  
re-engaging a whole body, felt-experience where I can  
apprehend, appreciate and fully grasp,  
ineffable experience  
beyond words, beyond thought, beyond logic.

Wonder is a multi-sensory kind of somatic, tactile engagement  
which arises out of the heart as a humming,  
a vibration of excitement that builds like a wave.  
Energy flowing from me to you and then back again  
as it feels bigger and expanded and then it flows out again  
and then flows back in a bigger wave.  
Being carried away on that wave –  
the massive back and forth,  
revelling in circularity and spirals reaching  
its crescendo then building again.

Pretty soon it's a whole body experience of rapt attention,  
wide eyed astonishment and surprise.  
Here is a sort of narrowing of consciousness in one respect  
and yet a widening of awareness,  
on all sensory levels in that relational space,  
where I am able to notice things I wouldn't normally notice.  
In such wonder I am aware of being a tiny part of the field,  
Of the relational space between us,  
and how it shifts and evolves.

This is completely different, your experience and mine,  
Yet we are having this shared experience.  
In wonder a mode of consciousness opens up,  
and suddenly consciousness has shifted.  
I am not hiding anything intentionally from the client,  
I am not keeping my reactions secret or compartmentalised.  
I am open and transparent.

#### **4.1.8 Nicholas: Wonder in Letting Be**

I'm working on creating space and openness,  
allowing things to be,  
to create a non-judgemental atmosphere.  
I'm struck by the strange notion of trying to force 'openness',  
like forcing oneself to relax – it never works.  
I catch myself and realize the power of my agenda.  
For a couple of moments I wrestle with the notion of 'un-forced' space –

a genuine sense of “letting beings be” as Heidegger would say.  
I start by becoming mindful, observing my felt-sense,  
curious of the immediate,  
the energy in the room, my client’s presence.  
I breathe. All thoughts flow past while I simply remain present.  
I feel a huge sense of relief that I can let go of this agenda.

The shape and quality of the silence has changed,  
a seismic shift in the silence.  
In that moment all the doors suddenly come open  
and things connect,  
I become more vulnerable, more permeable.  
There is something quite fluid as a therapist being in wonder.  
A space has opened up where everything is possible,  
but nothing is required.  
It is a high, this lightness, this buzz.  
God, this is the work we do, this is when it all comes together.

Afterwards where we just sit – it feels like the space is holding us,  
time seemed to stop and there is complete calm,  
Total relaxation,  
nothing needing to be said or done,  
Just being with.  
It’s also a welcoming like after the thunderstorm.  
You welcome that moment where the sun comes out again,  
and everything is fresh and damp. Just steaming a bit.  
That sense of renewal, renewal  
yes that’s it,  
renewal.

## **4.2 PART TWO: Overview of Themes**

No theme can exactly capture and contain the intersecting complexity and excessive nature of the phenomena that make up lived experience. Hycner (1985, p.290) clearly describes this inherent difficulty in thematic analysis when he states: “that it is impossible with human phenomena to totally delineate them. By their nature they are already an integral part of a whole and naturally co-penetrate each other.” Bearing this caution in mind, I have identified three overarching themes, each with a number of key sub-themes:

### **1. Being Open: The Wonder of Unknowing**

- a. Wonder is ineffable.
- b. Unknowing as being-lost.
- c. Suspended in unknowing: transcendent moments of wonder.
- d. Wondering: letting be into unknowing.



## 2. **Being With: The Experience of Wondrous Connection**

- a. An immediate, mutual encounter.
- b. In wonder separation disappears: attuned presence.

## 3. **Being Renewed: The Fresh Revelation of Wonder**

- a. Opening to discovery.
- b. Wonder is renewing.

Across the wider literature, the experience of wonder is a moment in which something or someone suddenly captures our attention in such a way that familiar conceptual frameworks are disturbed, bringing a sense of disorientation followed by the emergence of some new knowledge. These structural elements were certainly present in my participants' experience, although existing in a fluid, non-linear relationship to each other. Wonder in a therapeutic context is paradoxically experienced as both a state of unknowing and an experience of knowing something newly emergent. Wonder is an experience which both emerges from and discloses a profound level of being with another, to whom our attention is inexorably drawn. As I present these findings I remain mindful of Verhoeven (1972) and Gallagher *et.al.* (2015) who have cautioned that it is easy to lose focus on the experience of wonder itself and fall into descriptions of what wonder realises.

### 4.3 **Theme One. Being Open: The Wonder of Unknowing**

Even as our interview drew to a close, Ruben expressed his frustration with how he conceived wonder: "I struggle to define the phenomenon of wonder as its own entity ... it's not a construct, it is an experience." [R/83] Coming close to what wonder *is*, rather than what it is *not*, as my literature review revealed, has been taxing philosophers since the Early Greeks. Ruben's difficulty in describing the ephemeral nature of wonder, without representing it reductively as a conceptual object, was a central dilemma identified by all the participants in my study, generally at the start of the interviews or LEDs, and often repeated with frustration or puzzlement throughout the dialogue.

This core struggle seems located in the sense that wonder is a generative space of becoming, characterised by two aspects and most clearly articulated by Nicholas: "There were two things – there was the complete unknown and the wonder of the known. It was happening simultaneously." [N/38] Firstly, there is an unknowing from which something new emerges, whether this is new knowledge about the client, the participant herself/himself, or new understanding about the therapeutic process itself. The second, but linked, aspect of wonder is the experience of encountering the known in such a way that conceptual frames are displaced. In wonder we are cast into a state of temporary unknowing: previously clear knowledge is disturbed. The experience of wonder is thus shot through with an inability to conceptualise what was previously known in the same way as before.

The known for these participants focussed primarily on their pre-existing beliefs and assumptions about their clients, their own bodies, the nature of the relationship they had with the clients, their understanding of psychotherapeutic practice. Wonder, it emerges, is especially unsettling and humbling, as it discloses a world so full of possibility that we realise how little we actually know of human existence. What is striking about being rendered into a state of wonder-filled unknowing in the role of therapist is that this experience does not elicit anxiety, shame or doubt in our professional capacities. On the contrary, whilst experiencing wonder, it seems possible to withstand uncertainty in a way that opens us to distinct therapeutic potential.

Dwelling in unknowing as an essential aspect of their experience of wonder was communicated in four main ways throughout the participants' written descriptions and interviews: their struggle to find language to describe their experience; through narratives of being lost; allusions to a sense of transcendence; a sense of letting be or letting go of the desire to know.

#### **4.3.1 Wonder is Ineffable: "It's Not Yet Trapped in Language"**

There is an inherently ineffable, intangible, nebulous quality to wonder and so there was something entirely appropriate that all the participants expressed their struggles in describing their experiences. Accessing lived experience through a reflective process and then bringing this into language in a way that feels resonant and accurate is a challenge which faces all therapists who work phenomenologically with their clients. When a fundamental aspect of the phenomenon under investigation is a quality of unknowing, then this task is especially challenging. My own anxieties that this would be a difficult topic to describe have been echoed back to me by almost everyone I have talked with about this research. Only when I began to struggle with the words to shape my own lived experiences of wonder as a therapist did I begin to feel confident that this investigation was a possibility. Nevertheless, as I approached each interview, I was consumed by a renewed sense that maybe each participant would not be able to describe wonder in the sufficiently concrete ways I sought.

It is something I don't have a word for yet ... It's not yet trapped in language. [RU/12-13]

I am searching and struggling for words ... I don't know what to say ... I am so stuck for words [T/54]

We are getting into the ineffable territory. [D/42]

I admit I thought I am not sure quite what we are going to talk about for an hour – this is quite a nebulous topic. [N/43]

Even when some participants entered into a state of wonder during the interview process itself, describing their experience in that moment of immediacy was still problematic. John, for example, noted:

What I am becoming aware of is that the more I start to describe it to myself the more I withdraw from that normal experience I have. When I am in wonder ... the more I attempt to articulate it the more I actually move away from that space. [J/36]

There is something about the experience of wonder that particularly eludes description.

Whilst Mia did not explicitly identify difficulties in describing her experience in terms of finding the right language, her whole interview was in fact a process of moving from the unsettled position of not knowing if wonder is an aspect of her direct experience with clients, to discovering that she did in fact experience wonder. The phenomenon was so elusive that even though she sensed she must experience wonder with clients, after volunteering to be a participant and attempting to write her lived experience description she realised she could not identify one specific, one clear instance where there was a sense of wonder:

As I sit down to write about my sense of wonder in my therapeutic practice, I am struck with this gnawing feeling that wonder is perhaps not an experience that emerges all that directly in my encounters with clients. This comes as a surprise, and somewhat unsettling at that. I “wonder” why this is the case ... To me, it seems that wonder or the potential for wonder mostly lies at the backdrop of my awareness, as *part* of my more conscious attempt at being open to my clients, myself, and what surfaces in the therapeutic encounter and process. [M/LED/1-8]

This sense of being unsettled also permeated the start of her interview, as she described how her experience was altogether “hidden ... behind awareness”. During the process of being interviewed, however, she started to give form to her experience of wonder and “discovered” [M/6] that it was, in fact, not only an aspect at the foreground of her clinical work, but a strong feature of her experience of being in clinical supervision.

Throughout their reflections, participants conceptualised wonder spatially. In its aspect of the unknown, all but two of the participants offered explicit descriptions of how the experience of wonder emerges from, or connects them to, a space outside, beyond or behind cognition or conscious awareness, which they struggled to express. Ruben described how “wonder is something that is *outside* [his] thinking realm.” [RU/12] For Dave, the experience of wonder is one that is “*beyond* words, *beyond* thought, *beyond* logic.” [D/2] For Tony, there was a similar sense that to be in wonder is “going to a *beyond* ... *beyond* the thinking self”. [T/49] Mia, from an initial sense that wonder “lies at the *backdrop*”, [M/LED/6] came to understand how wonder actually opens her “up to something more ... *behind* sight”. [M/6] Andreas describes an aspect of wonder for him as being that intangible sense of something being elicited in a space behind awareness: “I don't know if I can explain it ... erm... explicitly I mean ... it's something *behind* the discussion, something *behind* the actual phenomenon.” [A/8]

To be in wonder is to come into contact with an intangible space – beyond, behind, outside of language, which paradoxically is also the generative space out of which, as therapists, we subsequently describe gain new knowledge about our clients, ourselves and the therapeutic process. In this context, wonder was experienced by all of the participants as a space of tacit knowing rooted in a pre-verbal embodiment which finds its fullest expression in the dialogical encounter with their

clients. I turn my attention to this play between unknowing and knowing in a later section on relatedness. For now I want to keep my focus – hard as that is to maintain – on describing a quality of unknowing as an essential aspect of wonder in a therapeutic setting. To dwell in such wonder is to be in touch with a pre-verbal, embodied quality before stepping into cognition, awareness and language.

One of Ruben's most significant experiences of wonder did not arise in a clinical setting. He introduced this experience, however, because it most clearly illustrated the essentially embodied quality of the phenomenon which he picked up in later descriptions:

[H]alf awake, half asleep ... I am not yet in a mode of verbal expression ... you start igniting the thinking machine and while you do it you have a very pre-verbal embodied experience of being and in this mode it is that I often encounter the experience of wonder. And that is why it's not easy to put wonder into words. [RU/10]

Acknowledging that this is indeed a phenomenon that is hard to put into words, I nevertheless invited Ruben to try to describe this non-verbal, embodied experience of wonder:

Paula: What is the ... when you are in that space ... going into the felt-sense of that experience ... the cognition hasn't come in yet, how do you experience it ... what is the physical experience ... is there any?

Ruben: Yes, now that you talk about it ... it's like a tingling feeling under my skin and it's an expanding feeling.

Paula: Tingling under your skin, an expanding ...

Ruben: It's an expanding ... I nearly want to use the word energy but that's a bit too ... well, I will leave it at that and see where I go ... it's like a flowing, expanding feeling of energy ... [Cough] ... and It's ... yeah ... actually I hear music when I think about it ... I hear music ... it's like hearing I don't know the English word ... a chord? ... It's like duuurrrrrrrrrrrrr [intones sound]. This is how it feels. This is how it feels. And it's a feeling of peace. Wonder is a feeling of peace ... Wonder is something that is outside of my thinking realm. When I am experiencing wonder something happens. I step into contact with something, someone, some experience that lies outside my, of my cognitive structure. It's something I don't have a word for yet.

Paula: Don't have a word for yet.

Ruben: Yes, there is no, it's not yet trapped in language. [P/10-RU/12]

Connecting with that felt-sense in the interview, he came to the realisation that: "for me ... thinking about it right now, it's something that comes out of myself from the inside ... it expands from my inside to the outside". [RU/15] This feeling was echoed when later he described another experience of wonder, using almost exactly the same words:

When it began I thought about it as "here we go, now it happens ... there is the moment" and I could feel the shift, that's where I was still cognitively inhibited in a way, trying to explain it to me all the time but I could feel the whole of my inside I started to feel warmer, again expanding, I felt more silent, again pre-verbal, it was like a moment of presence of energy, presence of ... OK let's ... let's just be excited about that there is anything at all ... [RU/25]

In his first example of awakening, where the cognitive machine has yet to be ignited, Ruben was in touch with a state of embodiment characterised by a felt-sense of tingling and expansion: the boundaries of his body are no longer as fixed as before. The second experience he called wonder, paralleled the first. In this, he was already awake but felt himself start to shift away from the cognitive. While he was aware that “it happens”, he was not in a fully conscious state. The experience of silence marked for him that this moment was pre-verbal. Coming close to what the wondrous “it” is, eluded Ruben. He was aware “it” originated from within him but could call it only “presence of energy”, even though this felt inadequate. Accessing another perceptual thread of sensory awareness, Ruben described the experience of wonder as having a musical aspect to it – a chord, which he could sing in the interview, attuning him to a feeling of peace.

All participants were aware of the embodiment of their experience of wonder most strongly when they described being-in relationship with their clients. I explore this relational dimension in more depth in a later section. What interests me here is the quality of their embodiment when they experience a moment of wonder as a state of unknowing. For Dave, this was a key aspect of the phenomenon to which he returned throughout his interview: “[Wonder] keeps us connected to the soma, the body and the body’s ability to apprehend and appreciate and fully grasp experience beyond words, beyond thought, beyond logic.” [D/2] When I invited Dave to connect with the felt-sense of his experience, like Ruben, the aural dimension and feelings of expansion were for him core elements, although the imagery of the wave was distinctive:

Dave: [T]he humming starts to make itself aware, energy flowing from me to you and then and back again as it feels bigger and expanded and then it flows out again and then flows back in a bigger wave. Erm that is where the humming and excitement can really build [D/47] ... Being carried away on that wave – the massive back and forth ...

Paula: So that sense of the wave, the overwhelming sense of movement ... is that a quality of wonder ... is that always there to a certain degree or not?

Dave: I think it crescendos, maybe multiple crescendos [laughs] but there is always the humming, the humming will come to a crescendo and then maybe go to a lower level again and then again crescendo. [D/49-50]

When he later steps into a more reflective space around the experience he had described, Dave observes:

I think other existential therapists, like James Bugental or even Irvin Yalom would refer to it as confronting our embodiedness when we have those ineffable kinds of aha’s that we struggle to put into words. [D/54]

In this sense, the embodied experience of wonder is a confrontation between pre-verbal unknowing and the coming (with difficulty) into language. This, was explicitly the experience which John felt was a central aspect to his being with clients. That the experience of wonder may in some way be connected to an out-of-awareness tacit knowing, which is shot through with embodiment was, as with Dave, a centrally important dimension of the phenomenon for John. It was an aspect to which he consistently returned:

And in my body I am feeling and within a moment of feeling something I then become conscious of feeling it and in that consciousness I am languaging it and when I start to language it I obviously move into that cognitive space again. [J/16]

His whole interview, and understanding of his experience of wonder as a felt-sense, became an exploration of this process of “languaging”. From a place of initial unknowing, John started to bring awareness into cognition which became material to be explored for its therapeutic potential. Whilst there was recognition of the unknown, there was also an inherent pull of “desire” [J/14] in the form of “will or wanting”, [J/15] to bring what was presently intangible into tentative, hesitant knowledge: “For as soon as I grasp something, feel something, there is a wanting to check with the other person or with myself.” [J/15] There is a similar sense of stirring intellectual movement described by Tony, when he searches and struggles for words to describe his experience. While he does not engage with a tacitly felt, embodied aspect of wonder as explicitly as others, he nevertheless intuits that the experience has its origin in something primordial:

There was certainly an intellectual movement but it wasn't primarily an intellectual movement it was much different to that it was ... I used the word tacit ... there was something erm primordial about it...I am searching and struggling for words... [T/8]

This sense of accessing some older, deeper originary space when experiencing wonder as unknowing is echoed in Ruben's realisation that during one of his wondrous happenings: “My neo-cortex was switched off at that moment, I was a limbic system”. [RU/39]

### **4.3.2 Unknowing as Being-Lost**

To dwell in the unknowing of wonder whilst working with clients is to be in touch with an experience of being-lost. John, for example, described how being “in the wonder” [J/15] is an experience of unknowing that facilitates his being in the tacit dimension of knowing: “I am consciously electing to put myself into a certain stance and losing myself in the wonder whilst I hear and feel what is going on.” [J/15] There is something paradoxical here, in the way John described “consciously electing to put myself in a certain stance” and then “losing myself in the wonder”. This stance, as he describes elsewhere, is in fact a turning inwards, into the felt-sense of his body behind his conscious awareness. Losing himself here suggests becoming embodied and disengaged from cognitive processes.

And then there is a shift out of that. For as soon as I grasp something, feel something, there is a wanting to check with the other person or with myself. So ... so soon as I get that I want to say: “Is this me? Is this something I am familiar with ... I ... er you know, used to or is this different? Is there a reason for this I am aware of? Or is this something that I am new to, and in the moment, and perhaps shares some commonality with the other? [J/15]

This sense of there being a shift out of the unknowing space of “the wonder” where there are open possibilities to something still indeterminate is reminiscent of Ruben's half-awake/ half-asleep state, where “igniting the thinking machine” has just started. From unknowing wonder John has shifted into

the state of wondering, which still has an element of disorientation. This is an experience which Andreas also describes at different moments in his interview: "Sometimes I tend to become lost while I wonder" [A/LED/32] "I feel the openness in a way that I even forget my starting point of wondering." [A/LED/41-43]

While not relating being-lost to their experience of wonder, and wondering as explicitly as John and Andreas did, Jason and Nicholas describe strikingly similar experiences. Their feeling of losing contact with their client generates a sense of stuckness, in terms of where to go next with the therapeutic process which proceeds a subsequent experience of wonder. In these cases, not knowing is a sense of loss (of connection or direction), which precipitates wonder as opposed to a sense of being-lost whilst in a state of wonder.

Jason works in a service for young offenders and both experiences of wonder he described involved initial loss of relational contact. Having told one of his clients he would not be available the following week, as he was going on holiday to Vienna, he noticed the young man did not engage with him for the rest of the session. As they stood at the door his client suddenly asked:

"Is Vienna in Europe?" Taken slightly aback by the question and also by his sudden "return" I replied that it was. He told me I had to be careful and that if I was kidnapped he wouldn't be able to do anything about it. It was too far away and he said "I don't have the skills", like the man in "Taken" to come and get you ... After having lost him for fifty minutes and feeling distressed by this, he suddenly came back and I felt overwhelmed by his concern and worry for me, and his helplessness to do anything should anything happen to me. I had an image of a toddler who gravitates to the caregiver with their little clinging arms. I felt amazed at what had happened – this only happens in books describing clinical vignettes in Object Relations. I felt overawed on so many levels. [JA/LED/13-18]

The experience of wonder Jason describes here emerges from a context of being-lost: the therapist's sense that he had lost his client and his feelings of helplessness which are powerfully mirrored in the client's distress at the possibility of losing him. Interestingly, when Jason later reflects on the significance of this experience, he picks up again the narrative of loss, but this time suggesting that the experience of wonder is in fact a signpost indicating to him that therapeutically he is, "on the right track":

Yes and part of the wonder is that I am so pleased I am in the profession and I dare say it ... I am doing something right to have these experiences happening ... I suppose wonder lets you know you are on the right track. [JA/69-70]

Here is the paradox of wonder in a therapeutic setting: the unknowing of wonder is also the site of disclosing truth.

The experience of wonder Nicholas described occurs, like Jason, with a young man who on this occasion seemed lost to him. Unlike Jason, who felt lost and helpless in the face of the apparent lack of therapeutic connection, Nicholas described how he forcefully tried to penetrate his client's closed-off state:

This evening the client seems reluctant, lost and unable to find his voice – nothing new here for this is the work. But I sense myself becoming impatient and somewhat over confident; stepping in with observations and asking for feelings. Why am I pushing? What do I want from my client? If we could only turn this corner then things would start to flow more easily. The client has withdrawn into tight circle, head bent down and eyes firmly shut. [N/LED/1-9]

It was only when Nicholas finally lets go of his agendas and apologises to his client for being so imposing that an unexpected catharsis occurs of great therapeutic value for the client, and leaves Nicholas “suspended, it is a moment of *wonder*” [N/LED/9-10]:

[T]here was the wonder of: gosh, he is getting it, he is working it through! There is something happening here ... It was almost, there were two things – there was the complete unknown and the wonder of the known. It was happening simultaneously. So the unknown was it happened in that moment to the client in the way it did. And the wonder of the known was how the mind and what we know about the mind and the theories ... it was how we hold those two things, two forms of wonder at once. Which again might be the multi-layered aspect to this. [N/8-9]

For Nicholas, this was a moment of being suspended by two aspects of wonder. First is his genuine unknowing – being at a loss – about what might have led to his client making such a breakthrough. The second is his wonder at the psychotherapeutic process which suddenly opened up for him anew. That he could be in a state of unknowing, while still retaining knowledge of the psychotherapeutic process, communicated something important to him about the nature of wonder. To be in wonder meant entering a suspended state of unknowing whilst still being aware of the profundity of his knowing.

### **4.3.3 Suspended in Unknowing: Transcendent Moments of Wonder**

The experience of wonder seems to emerge in distinct phases. After a period of dwelling in the unknown of wondering suddenly a therapist can be struck with wonder. Something can happen in the clinical encounter which throws us into wonder. Suspended moments of wonder contrast with more developed periods of wondering. Being in wonder is a distinctly short-lived and intensely-felt, embodied experience where habitual thinking gets disrupted, while, on the other hand, there is a sense of being acutely present and fully aware in a different way from usual. John and Tony, in the descriptions above, referred to this as an embodied, tacit or primordial knowing. When I asked Dave whether “there is a change when you are in a state of wonder – is there a quality difference to your experience?” [R/18] his response echoed the quality of experience described by others. He understood it as being simultaneously embodied but in an altered state of consciousness:

I think it is part of what I call sometimes the therapy trance where there is a lessened awareness necessarily of what is going on in the outside world and the whole world becomes that relational, dialogical space where we are both so focussed on what has happened that that is sort of the world for a moment. So there is sort of, a narrowing of consciousness in one respect and yet a widening of awareness on all sensory levels in that relational space where then you are able to notice things you wouldn't notice in a normal, casual interaction in a body experience. Little things that the client might be doing in their bodily experience, maybe



shared bodily experience you are aware of having. All of this things and to me it is a multi-sensory kind of thing of somatic, tactile sensory engagement. [D/18]

This sense of entering a different state of being was also shared by Tony, when he suggested that for him there was a distinctly “transcendent” [T/45] quality to his experience of being suspended in wonder. This aspect intensified his incapacity to give it language. “I don’t envy you writing this – I am so stuck for words,” [T/54] he confessed, directly after his attempt to clarify what he called the “transcendent” experience of wonder which he had shared with his client, Kara. Both had witnessed each other being struck by wonder at the “magical spectacle” [T/53] of a flock of birds in a tree outside the treatment room:

I would call it transcendent, I believe that is a word that is not understood and often misused so I am reluctant to use it but I would call it that. But what I would mean is the movement to a new state of being. I don’t mean it in any other way, I mean that there is a new state of being and that is experienced in every facet I can think of, know of. For instance in smiling at Kara I could feel my smile. [T/45]

This emphasis on the here-and-now, concrete reality rather than a supernatural dimension to the experience of wonder was so important to Tony that he returned, later in his interview to clarify his use of “magical spectacle” in his written description:

When I used the word magical spectacle – it isn’t sufficiently grounded because this was grounded to the reality of a being together in this world and that moment in itself that was the wonder. To know that, to realise that, to be in that space. That is the wonder. [T/53]

What is striking is that while appealing to something supernatural to describe wonder, there is, like in Dave’s experience of an altered state of consciousness, an emphasis on the grounded or embodied dimension to the experience. Despite the religious discourse which shapes some of the historical-cultural connotations of wonder, there were no allusions by any participant to the ultimate unknowable – God. Wonder in all its ineffability is concretely experienced in the body or in the dialogical space of relationship with the human other. This sense of wonder as a transcendent experience is one which emerged most fully when participants described their being with clients, which is the focus of my second over-arching theme.

#### **4.3.4 Wondering: Letting Be into Unknowing**

In this thread of unknowing in the experience of wonder, there are two distinct aspects: the temporary, suspended moments of wonder, which carry an intensely affective, almost transcendent quality which exceed language, and more extended periods of unknowing as “wondering”, which are partially associated with a more cognitive dimension of awareness. It is this second aspect of wondering I turn to here. I am mindful that whilst participants identified these as distinct dimensions of their experience of wonder, they were clear that there could be a connection between them. Sometimes wondering resulted in an unexpected and spontaneous state of suspended wonder. At other times, wondering was triggered by such an experience of wonder.

To have the ability to be in a consciously open, unknowing stance of wondering, Nicholas argued, is something that existential-phenomenological therapists “are encouraged or trained to have”. [N/2] In a similar way, Andreas described how: “For me ‘wondering’ describes the essence of phenomenology.” [A/LED/9-10] Reflecting on her initial inability to see where she experienced wonder with clients, Mia was thrown into doubt about her very identity as an existential-phenomenological therapist:

I guess I almost felt coming into this interview there must be something wrong with me that I don't experience wonder in therapy sessions, it's like aren't we supposed – especially working phenomenologically, aren't we supposed to have a sense of wonder? [M/42]

How participants were able to deliberately and actively step into an aspect of unknowing in the form of wondering was a focus at some point in all eight interviews. This attention naturally led them into reflecting on *how* they are able to suspend prior knowing and be genuinely open with their clients, and how this experience of wondering was similar or different to curiosity. Nicholas, for example, identified the letting-go of agendas as a central aspect of his experience of being authentically in wondering with a client. But being agenda-less, as he observes in his interview, is not something that can be simply willed into existence – indeed, this would be a contradiction:

Despite my best efforts I find it all too easy to fall into the trap of “wanting” something for my clients even with the best of intentions, there seems to be an agenda. It's hard to find that balance between the clients' needs and providing a sense of containment and focus. [N/LED/21-24]

Of all participants, it was Nicholas, in his written lived experience descriptions, who gave the clearest account of how wondering, as a process of consciously letting-go of agendas, could open the potential for wonder to emerge. I quote Nicholas here at some length, as his words describe not only this surrendering to unknowing, but the moment where there is a “shift” into a qualitatively different experience of wonder as a space full of – as yet – unknown possibilities:

I'm working on creating space and openness, allowing things to be, to create a non-judgemental atmosphere where he can learn to trust his voice and feel free to speak his mind. Somehow my client senses this is what I “want” from him. To be heard without criticism or reprimand. Knowing this only seems to add to the pressure. His experiences of the “other” are always in terms of expectations. “What do they want?” “What is expected of me?” There is additional tension, which seems counter-productive. I'm struck by the strange notion of trying to force “openness”, like forcing oneself to relax – it never works. I catch myself and realize the power of my agenda. By stopping I become acutely aware of a question – if you can force openness how does it occur? For a couple of moments I wrestle with the notion of “un-forced” space – a genuine sense of “letting beings be” as Heidegger would say. I start by becoming mindful, observing my felt-sense, curious of the immediate, the energy in the room, my client's presence – I breathe. I watch the contorted shape of my client as he struggles with his internal battle between expression and repression. I hear noises from the street outside. Suddenly the room gate-crashes into this meditative calm as the central heating starts, pipes and radiators rattle into life. All these thoughts flow past while I simply remain present. I feel a huge sense of relief at not trying, of accepting that it is painful to watch my client struggle, of not rushing to rescue him. Within a moment these feelings have passed too. The shape and quality of the silence has changed. In surrendering to the not knowing, by not forcing anything and by keeping in check my intention to “do” I begin to feel a shift. A space has opened up where everything is possible but nothing is required. [N/LED/25-54]

Reflecting on this moment in his interview, Nicholas considered the possibility that: “Maybe because I had completely surrendered all my agendas and not wanting anything that moment of wonder could happen because it was spontaneous and natural.” [N/13] This unexpected moment of wonder was made possible by the proceeding experience of wondering characterised by an attentive waiting, without forcing or willing for what lay close to him: his own embodied being in the room with his client. The wondering he describes was to wait without expectation of his client’s content to emerge or meet him.

For John, the experience of wonder was suspended between activity and passivity with wondering associated with the former aspect and being-in wonder the latter. Like Nicholas, John’s experience of wonder also describes an initial phase of active focussing on himself by centring upon his breath. Whilst there are clear similarities here to Nicholas’ description, in that John consciously creates a space of mindful awareness of his felt-sense, there is also a clear distinction between the two experiences. Nicholas describes letting-go of *all* agendas, whereas John is explicit about holding onto something he feels is crucial: the underpinning “conviction” that whatever needs to be known will emerge in the dialogical space between himself and his client. This is a belief in the potential of unknowing to somewhat paradoxically reveal the previously unknown:

I have a conviction, a conviction that what I am feeling is – erm an attuning. And at the same time experience has demonstrated to me that it is often a shared experience and because it’s a shared experience it’s now a way of hearing and listening to the other and sharing with the other what I never knew – it was never part of my awareness, never part of my culture, my upbringing my logical way of thinking. [J/7]

The initial phase of wonder John describes has a “cognitive element” to it which he suggests: “comes from desire ... will and wanting to do this”. [J/14-15] He also acknowledges being moved with “passion for wanting to grasp” what is being experienced by the client but which is at present still outside of their awareness or ability to describe. Willing, wanting, grasping sound very similar to the impulse Nicholas describes recognising in himself: an impulse which actively shut his client down. But for John, his “will and wanting” are not actively directed towards his client, which is what Nicholas finally let go of. The “this” John describes is the “passion” or “willingness” to be fully present and open in the conviction that wondering will reveal something new and therapeutically significant.

Whereas Nicholas speaks of “letting be”, for John the experience of wondering most present in this aspect is of “listening”:

There is an attitude of wonder and first of all it’s adopting the attitude which is in that place where I am listening out for. And then ... as I attune to that space it’s more of a kind of being in wonder ... in that moment. So there is a ... erm ... a kind of a creating of the space in the first place or allowing that space or listening out for that space which is an active process ... [J/11]

There is an implied sense here that wonder is something not yet fully present but is available to John if he prepares himself for it through wondering as an experience of listening – to himself and his client. “Being in wonder” [J/11] is an experience that John needs to be attentive to, and create space for. In

this attitude of open wondering and listening, John describes his experience in a similar way to Nicholas' mindful awareness. There is: "more of a stillness of my thoughts in order to hear what is going on for me in an embodied kind of way, to attune to what I am feeling and to notice that". [J/15] Like Nicholas, the experience of wondering for John is also filled with a sense of expectation, of potentiality – that under the right conditions, the experience might shift and being in wonder might manifest.

As described in chapter two, the differentiation between wonder and curiosity is a well-developed discourse within philosophy. They are terms that have, over time, been subsumed, separated, given variable priority and value. In John's initial phase of "wondering", the phenomenon is similar to curiosity, which he describes as a "deep interest". [J/5] He describes being moved with "passion" to "grasp" [J/5] what is being experienced by the client, but which is at present still outside of their awareness or ability to describe. This aspect of wondering or curiosity aims to bring the relationship into focus and direct attention towards those aspects of the client's lived experience not being addressed in the room:

I have this curiosity "What is going on between us and what is being felt?" And so sometimes I begin with that as a way of changing the space and erm changing the way we relate to each other. [J/43]

Such curiosity, is experienced as listening out for:

What I often imagine is being avoided ... that's our vulnerability, our feelings, a felt-sense that you know which underpins a client in the room in the first place. So that's kind of being avoided. [J/45]

In his curious wondering, John is looking to compare his own felt-sense with his client's, looking for similarity or difference as a way to give language to something which has been previously outside awareness or comprehension. Here the process of finding language invites the question is this the same or different? "And with that begins the process of wondering what they are feeling ... is it the same?" [J/47] Wondering here suggests categorising, which is distinct to the prior felt sense of co-created being-in the wonder of unboundaried experience. Here, John is being curious in order to help clients find language to describe experience which has previously existed on the edges of their thinking. Inviting them to choose a stone, John encourages his clients to imagine how their experience feels, weighs in a concrete, material way:

I have to be curious and almost help them in that process of using these kind these comparisons in order to relate to something that there aren't any words for and can't easily being described. [J/47]

Adopting a curious stance in relation to their experience, whilst inviting an imaginative play of comparison, John opens up a space for something previously only intuited to take form.

Towards the end of the interview, John says this process of curiosity as attuning to and listening out for what is being avoided is "alien" to a process of looking for answers and advice" [J/40], which is familiar to many of his clients. This suggests that curiosity for him in the first instance is one of open exploration, of a willingness to be present with the unknown. Recognising the vulnerability that gaining

access to new awareness may bring to his clients, John's stance of open curiosity is an invitation, a welcoming of newness as opposed to potential rejection. In wondering curiosity, he models a way of being open to something which might otherwise be "scary":

And there is also curiosity which is about their reaction to this whole process. With some people it really ... with some people it's a moment of realisation or opening as well ... because the knowledge, they are not expecting it necessarily, and because it is opening up the different worlds for them, different spaces, different ways of relating to themselves and others and they are not accustomed to. So there is an additional curiosity often going on about that whole process and what is happening for them in this moment when we do this very different thing and whether this is going to be helpful and meaningful to them and whether this is, you know scary for them, that they might reject. [J/41]

On a number of occasions in the interview, Mia identified herself as an inquisitive person and the passion "to know" is something that defines her. But when she describes her wondering as being the experience of curiosity, the qualities of openness are resonant of other participants' descriptions of wondering:

So the focus would be again on facilitating my client in my attitude of curiosity in a loving and non-judgemental way and try to encourage them to go more deeply into their own experience, their own world. [M/53]

She is explicit that the "proper context" [M/46] for curiosity was love: "otherwise it would turn the space into voyeurism". [M/46] Love for Mia helps her avoid the possibility of objectification, which as Ruben cautions lies at the heart of curiosity, and which is simply about amassing knowledge:

In the case study I describe a curiosity where I want to know more about her life and for why she does this and that, and why she has been in a psychiatric unit but at this point it's not in our relationship that I need to know it, it's just me wanting to be curious and that is not wonder. [RU/54]

#### **4.4 Theme Two. Being With: The Experience of Wondrous Connection**

To be in relationship is at the heart of existential psychotherapy and there is a fundamental interconnection of wonder and relatedness. Wonder not only emerges from a relationship with clients, but the experience of wonder opens up a quality of being with clients that has the potential for transformation in both personal and professional lives. As Ruben insisted, "Wonder is the expression of the experience of relatedness." [RU/31]

The phenomenon of wonder is the experience of being opened into a state of full presence in relation to the other. Whilst each written description and interview revealed a unique experience of this relational aspect of wonder, there were nevertheless common threads that ran between them all: mutuality, presence, connection, attunement, openness, love, trust, humility, vulnerability. Describing these aspects in the context of the therapeutic relationship from which they arose will, I hope, evoke how a particular type of relationship is at the heart of wonder.

#### 4.4.1 Wonder: An Immediate, Mutual Encounter

Wonder reveals itself in the context of the therapeutic relationship. The way such relatedness lies at the centre of the phenomenon of wonder was perhaps most clearly expressed by Ruben. Describing a moment of being suspended in wonder which was strongly embodied and experientially felt as “a flowing moment” [RU/25], of “expanding” [RU/28], he emphasised how he never loses his sense of the other. In wonder there is simultaneously a felt-sense of self and “a state of high concentration on the other”:

So even if I might be the one who wonders, it is the I who is focussed on someone and not so much on myself. So again, wonder is a very related, intra-subjective – let me not use the word intersubjective – it’s an experience that has, that implies there is a connection, a relatedness with somebody. I cannot have a wonder experience, experience wonder if I don’t know what it means to encounter another person. [RU/46]

Following his description of feeling the limits of his physical body as no longer fixed, I asked if the flowing energy he feels is contained within his newly extended boundaries or flows between himself and his client:

Between ... mostly between because really so far I realise I have only been contemplating wonder in the context of in between-ness, relating to the other. I have had experiences, I did have experiences now I think about it, where I experienced wonder by myself, but again, in those situations I experienced the wonder in relation to somebody else that I imagined to talk to or have in my mind. So wonder is an expression of the experience of relatedness ... [pause] ... yeah. [RU/31]

Exploring different experiences of wonder as an expression of relatedness, he describes in each a quality of connection that has a striking level of profundity which he captures with the exclamation: “Phew! And you know when you are in that space then you are not fulfilling a role any more, not in a function but you are in an immediate, mutual encounter of existence more or less.” [RU/25] Wonder is experienced here not only as a dropping away of all that separates him from an/other – roles and functions – but in this suspended moment, Ruben senses both himself and his client are mutually connected with Being. “This is a space in which something therapeutic is happening right now,” [RU/22] he declares. His evidence for such conviction in the mutuality of wonder is contained in the notes of the therapeutic process one of his clients kept and shared with him. The transformative moments she identified were always, he said, in “the moments [he] felt wonder”. [RU/22] It is an important feature of Ruben’s experience of wonder that it is a mutually shared experience. Describing his psychotherapeutic work in a hospital setting, Ruben reflects on how he can often be called in to work with patients in a palliative care ward whom his colleagues cannot understand or reach. In this end of life setting, the potential for a mutual moment of wonder is both possible and therapeutically significant:

And if we both, the client and I – and with others in the room – it happens more often than not – create this moment of wonder in which actual encounter takes place. Its then that

we learn something about this situation and we can understand why that person behaves how he/she behaves. How he/she feels. How he/she makes sense, meaning of her situation in the world. [RU/68]

As well as dropping roles and functions, in a moment of wonder Ruben describes letting go of projections and dwelling in a state of relational openness:

Ruben: How do I experience the other? Present, alive, that is also important ... it's not a thing it's a person so I am exactly not sure what is going to happen. I experience the ... how to put this into words ... In my internal risk management I might be controlling for negative situations but other than that I don't know much about what is going to come. There is no forecasting, fortune telling, prophylactic planning ... it's very much a moment of here and now holding and waiting.

Paula: Holding and waiting. What is holding and waiting?

Ruben: Holding in this situation is me, holding a space, opening up a space of encounter, of finding out, of the potentiality. And waiting is ... less active ... is more passive. Whilst holding is an active way of dealing with the situation, the waiting part is letting go of activity. It's passive. It's exactly not trying to influence the next step. [RU/47-48]

To be vulnerable and open is a risky space to exist in. Ruben's reference here to his "internal risk management" is a reminder that this surrender is potentially dangerous. He is explicit, therefore, that for wonder to exist there needs to be trust:

In this aspect wonder for me has something to do not only with trust but also love. I see a connection. If you, if I can allow myself to be wondrous then I trust so much that I don't need to defend myself or protect myself then I can be in a space of child-like regressed wonder about existence. And if I learn that this can be a very painful experience then I guess it's easy to lose the motivation or the bravery even to step into this space of wonder. Yes this ... is ... there I see a connection there. Trust, love and wonder have to do with each other. [RU/33]

Integral to Ruben's description of wonder as a relational experience are the qualities of mutuality, trust and love. These were emotions which also permeated Tony's experience of wonderment with his client, Kara. This was different to other participants' descriptions as it was a wonderful happening, a "magical spectacle" which originated outside the therapeutic space but which evoked a transformation in himself, Kara and their relationship:

Then as I looked at her I noticed an almost imperceptible change in her face. Something in her eyes and mouth had changed, her facial muscles relaxed. She moved in her chair as if relieving stiffness and her face moved to a half smile. Her eyes were fixed on something outside my window and she moved her hand to point to something. I looked through the window.

In a small tree near the window a flock of long-tailed tits, a big flock of tiny pink and black animated baubles were filling the tree as they fluttered around from one branch to another. I smiled because of the magical charm of that sight and turning to Kara I found her grinning at me. Kara looked younger, her eyes were wide with wonder, she made short gurgles of laughter and for the first time she looked straight into my eyes. She had opened to the world for the first time in my presence and simultaneously I had opened to her a little more, she knew my smile. Time had stopped as we shared something of ourselves that no amount of words could express adequately. We had each witnessed the other respond to the birds with wonder and this opening of the self to the world had allowed us to meet.

In the eternity of the brief couple of minutes Kara and I shared many things. We shared a feeling of approval of one to the other, a sense of transcendence to another state of being, a connection to the earth, a social coming together as witnesses of a magical sight. My wonder was not only with sharing the tacitly experienced social connection with Kara, which had been facilitated by the arrival of the birds, it was also at the look of extreme wonderment in Kara. [T/LED/1-32]

The entirety of Tony's interview was exploring the few moments he describes here in his written experience. There was an initial, familiar stuck space of separation – where Kara is silent and unavailable to him. Here Tony was trying to “not impinge upon her and at the same time not retreat from her so she could meet me whenever she wanted”. [T/27] Suddenly an event occurred which: “blew it all away”. [T/52] In the space and suspended time of wonder their old way of being together was transformed.

Tony: From this stoniness came through this moment of wonder a kind of excited, [in breath] engagement.

Paula: Excited engagement.

Tony: It was an acceptance between us in that moment and because we were joint witnesses of the spectacle outside, and we both witnessed each other in the room at the same time and that is what ... I don't know what to say ... [laughs]. [T/33-34]

Through wonder came engagement which was characterised by mutuality. Tony described how he had been holding and waiting for Kara to meet him in whatever way she chose. In this magical moment she chose to *invite* him into her newly magical world:

Paula: I also realise you were joint witnesses and that Kara invited you in that moment.

Tony: She did ... She DID. I couldn't see it from where I was ... she pointed to it and so she did, she invited me. Yes! [T/34-35]

This moment displaced their habitual therapist-client power dynamic, replacing it with one where they were genuinely equal partners in a situated moment of shared discovery. Responding to my enquiry into how he experienced this moment, Tony emphasised the reciprocity of their opening to one another:

There is a kind of... opening ... Kara let me in ... a fraction of a second after she had let the spectacle outside in and I opened in response and then everything, each bit of that triangle witnessed the other in a way ... Kara and I gave witness to each other and the window spectacle so there was a mutual opening. [T/38]

This experience of wonder was particularly profound for Tony due to the relational depth it facilitated. A wholly unexpected opening occurred not only between himself and Kara, but also an opening to the world in which they were both situated. As I probed more deeply the phenomenon of opening as he had experienced it in this moment of wonder, Tony paused in reflection. For him there was an accompanying upward movement which “means a movement towards love”. [T/41] This experience of wonder led to an experience of shared love.



Love ... and it's not love for the other person but it is but for everything [laughs] for the birds outside as well and it's an upward, how can I be so arrogant to say this but it's an upward movement that I know we both shared ... There was a difference from then on. It's almost like from then on she could trust me. We witnessed each other as well as stuff happening outside. So that is the equalising. I am sure she trusted me more from then on. [T/43]

Whilst the experience of wonder for Tony equalised his relationship with Kara, he was emphatic that this equalising was not a merging of the two:

I am going to be really precise here ... nit-picking ... it's not that we merged into a one it's that we were individual and together as one ... So, it wasn't a complete merging but being together and knowing each other as here together in this world. I think that this does happen with clients and it's always a kind of point we don't always get to but sometimes get to. This was the most extraordinary one that I have experienced ... In meeting in this way although I remain separate I also become joined. It's not a meeting in which I see the object of my client, it's a meeting in which I see and feel and know. [T/55-56]

This experience of wonder for Tony was extraordinary, in that it not only facilitated a meeting of two human beings characterised by an unusual depth of mutuality, openness, and presence, but revealed to him the wonder of this relationship. What started out as an object of wonder moved into the wonder of truly being with another in this moment of existence: "being-together in this world and that moment in itself that was the wonder?" [T/53]

#### **4.4.2 In Wonder Separation Disappears**

In wonder the power dynamic between client and therapist is equalised into an I-Thou relationship. A moment of wonder opens the doors which can stand between client and therapist to reveal their existential being-together as imperfect, struggling, vulnerable human beings. Reflecting on the moment standing in doorway of the therapy room, stunned by his client's revelation of how much their relationship mattered, Jason realised that his experiences of wonder both emerge from and illuminate the depth of his relationships with clients:

But the real sort of wonder was more about his erm sense our connection and I felt completely overawed that he, that we had connected and he valued it and would have missed the connection and it was erm you know a strong sense of love really. [JA/9]

Part of Jason's wonder was that despite his client's social and familial alienation, he was still able to not only feel a connection with him, but through reference to a moment in a film, express the importance their relationship played in his life:

[R]ealising the connection, seeing and feeling it. And there was the wonder that that person was able to express a connection because that person in particular, they all are, but that one in particular is very damaged. There was a sense of wonder that came from him. [JA/20]

This moment of wonder at the reality of their relationship moves into a sense of wonder in the presence of his client with whom he feels such connection and love: "There was a sense of wonder that come from him". In the wonder of their connection his client was suddenly wonderful:

It is the wonder that the connection is made possible in the first place and it is that wonder of human connection and about if you can just stay with something and tolerate something long enough that something comes from it. [JA/24]

While Tony's experience of wonder both revealed and deepened his relationship with Kara, Jason's gave him an unexpected insight into the relational depth already in existence between himself and his clients. Wonder also disclosed the unconscious processes underpinning these relationships:

It was a wonder because ... It was a surprise and when it happened it was a sense of wonder because it was unexpected and it was wonderful. It was wonderful to see these psychological processes in action from a theoretical standpoint ... it was wonderful to see that played out. It was quite affirming of the work ... it's all true. [JA/20]

Throughout his interview, Jason's descriptions had two clear aspects. The first was a physical sense of wonder being a peak experience which generally starts in the chest:

[I]t is quite overwhelming and a little bit, not draining is the wrong word because it is quite fulfilling, it feels very nice but a bit too nice, a bit too pleasant to be pleasant. [JA/14]

It feels nice, but too ... what do you do with that feeling in the chest? It's a nice feeling but there is nowhere for it to go. [JA/15]

I was left with this nice sort of erm warm feeling in the chest which is overwhelming and does stay for a long time. And probably is a bit too strong, like erm you know like ecstasy drugs must feel like ... it's a bit too much. [JA/16]

In the moment at the door it didn't have that too much but afterwards I was left with that feeling ... it's a pleasant feeling but it's a bit over. [JA/18-19]

I often leave our sessions with this quite overwhelming feeling in the chest as well. [JA/31]

The second striking aspect of his descriptions were their excessive quality – which aroused in Jason the desire to share his experience with someone. Wonder evokes a desire to connect:

[I]t is very bright, it's very uplifting, it's like the lights go on, its wow, it's very happy, and I suppose what I am left with is "God that Happened, wasn't that nice and what can I do with it?" I want to tell somebody, yes, tell somebody, I want somebody else to feel it. Yes, I want somebody else to feel it. [JA/46]

[I]n the moment there is a wonderful illuminating feeling and afterwards there is a feeling of wow that just happened I want to tell somebody. [JA/62]

This inherent movement towards connection is also embedded in how the very physical dimension of inhabiting space with another is changed during his experience of wonder:

Perhaps the space disappears a little bit, separation disappears a bit in line with feeling a connection. Everything gels and connects the physical, you don't notice the physical space so much and you don't notice the separation so much between you. [JA/67]

In essence, Jason's experience of wonder emerges from connectedness, reveals connection, has the felt-sense of removing separation and also carries within it the physical and emotional-volitional impulse towards connection.

Nicholas' description of wonder as an unexpected breakthrough moment closely echoed Jason's vibrational, illuminating, uplifting sensations and amazement at the profundity of therapy: "Yes, a high ... you suddenly get this high, this lightness, this buzz, God, this is the work we do, this is when it all comes together. Yes the high is the best way to describe it." [N/5] What seems particularly significant in this expression of wonder as a peak experience is that at its centre is a sense of connection: "this is when it all comes together". Reflecting on the nature of these unexpected moments of wonder, Nicholas first draws an analogy with Buber's concept of the I-Thou relationship to describe how it can't be forced. But this analogy then slips into being a description of the nature of the moment of wonder:

[I]t's something you can't, like Buber's I-Thou, you can't force it. You can't wish it. It just happens in a moment and you suddenly realise you are in it or it's happened ... it happened in so many ways, it has a multi dimensionality to it. There was the impact between the client and I because suddenly there was a connection, a depth of connection or a connecting in an I-Thou sense. [N/2]

As described in the earlier section on "unknowing", Nicholas' written description and interview explored wondering as a process of continually "easing off" and "letting go", until he was able to reach a place in himself which he recognised as "a pure, open state", whereby he was available to becoming attuned to the client:

Even the agenda of letting go of agendas becomes an agenda so it was almost just, it was becoming very present moment focussed. Just what am I experiencing in this moment with my client? I became more attuned to his absolute frustration at not being able to express what he wanted to even though he had done it before in the room and knew he could. [N/18]

Though wondering is a developmental process of progressively opening and attuning to the client, he cautions that whilst we might "talk about an open stance", we cannot assume that we actually are open:

[L]ike I said in the thing ... we can try but we can't force it, we can hope and we can sort of think we are being open but are we really being open? In the case of wonder, wonder opens us rather than we open wonder. [N/33]

Wondering in this sense is not the end of openness but an open invitation to the possibility of deeper openness:

Nicholas: I think it opens us actually. I mean that explains a lot actually that sense of it, you know, if you invite it, it will come and do its stuff.

Paula: There is an invitation you are suggesting there, an invitation to wonder?

Nicholas: No, coz that would go against what I was saying earlier about you can't force it, but I think openness, invitation I think implies an openness, you are open to. But it's a different form of openness to the openness that wonder opens. Do you see?

Paula: Tell me more.

Nicholas: There is ... I think wonder opens a more profound or deep sense of openness. [N/34-36]

For Nicholas, wondering can lead us towards openness and attunement, but this is not yet the I-Thou relationship he intimates as the potential gift wonder opens us to. It is the elusive *moment* of wonder which makes possible a radical, spontaneous opening and deepening of the relationship.

With wonder it's almost like the quality of the therapy drops down a deeper level. The atmosphere sort of changes, the atmospheric change that almost means it's possible but it doesn't have to happen. [N/25]

The moment when Nicholas is witness to the unexpected cathartic release of his young client: "the wonder of gosh, he is getting it, he is working it through ... there is something happening here", [N/8] initiates a mutually perceptible shift in the relationship:

Nicholas: I am a bit wary ... there was an I-Thou, deep connection. It wasn't like a merging but erm ... there was a lot of complete connection, trust, a real sense of energy between the two of us. You could feel the tangible connection. But also I am aware there was a moment where I thought this is extraordinary. When I went into that meta-position where I was observing myself and the client then it sort of broke. I was sort of aware I was out of wonder. And then I was able to sit and enjoy the silence and what followed was not completely disconnected from my client but I was in that meta- or observing role than when I was in wonder. The two of us were completely as, not as one, but connected.

Paula: So what is the connection? You say it was tangible. What was the quality of connection there?

Nicholas: I just think it was ... what I would say is psychic resonance – we were not as one but we were resonating. There was ... we both clearly got something different from the moment but it was a powerful moment we both shared ... I am sure we both had different views but there was almost like something had connected us in that moment but I don't know I could describe any more though it just felt a very strong bonded connection in that moment. [N/10-11]

To be deeply open to another is to become vulnerable. As Tony described, in witnessing Kara he was witnessed by her. In such a moment of relational depth, Nicholas acknowledges that his client's material may touch his own:

Nicholas: There may be some base of poignant connection between the two things that happened and in that moment all the doors suddenly come open and the things connect and you do become more vulnerable. Yeah. But there is something about barriers coming down I think as we are talking now. There is something about barriers coming down or becoming more permeable, there is something quite fluid as a therapist being in wonder. I mean it can be quite unsettling actually.

Paula: Unsettling in ...?

Nicholas: Yeah, in a sense ... of a degree of vulnerability you encounter in the moment. [N/31-32]

Such openness would be risky, Ruben admits, except that in wonder vulnerability is safely held by an accompanying felt-presence of trust and love.

#### 4.4.3 Wonder as Attuned Presence

Intrinsic to the lived experience of wonder is a powerful sense that it is a phenomenon in which separation between client and therapist disappears. In wonder there is a sense of attunement and flow. This is the central theme in John's written description and interview. For John, the experience of wonder is one of being "taken over" [J/4] by a deep, empathic attunement with his client. At this point, his connection with the client is a deeply shared felt-experience. In his written description for example he depicts this process:

I see myself looking at this lady, I notice how I feel. There is a pressure in my chest that is building. A similar pressure is developing behind my eyes. I feel sad and equally didn't want to cry. I notice this and wonder if the client feels the same, so I ask her trying not to interrupt the process too. [J/LED/1-4]

Being in wonder is an attunement whereby John's embodied experiences are no longer simply his own but may in fact be the felt-sense of his client: "Our vulnerability, our feelings, a felt-sense that you know which underpins a client in the room in the first place." [J/45] Across relational space, John experiences physical, internal, somatically-based sensations which he intuitively is being similarly experienced by his client, and which might contain new understanding. Being in wonder means boundaries and the concept of separation become ambiguous.

Is this me? Is this something I am familiar with ... I ... er you know, used to or is this different? Is there a reason for this I am aware of? Or is this something that I am new to, and in the moment, and perhaps shares some commonality with the other? [J/15]

Being in wonder for John is thus profoundly dialogical: a space of embodied co-creation of hidden or inaccessible knowledge.

The qualities of being in wonder as attunement are circularity and fluidity: "[T]here is a movement to it ... it feels sort of fluid". [J/25] "It's a cyclical thing." [J/25] Once established, John sees wonder as an experience which serves the client. He does not simply dwell in wonder, but in a flowing movement steps back into a wondering state of curiosity to re-establish a boundary and check with the client: is this mine or is this yours?

[W]here there is a movement between what I am experiencing and feeling and noticing that and stepping back from that and also checking with the client and asking what he is feeling and asking him to describe what is going on ... It is a very much a movement. [J/4]

Fluidity exists not simply between John and his client but within him. There is a movement between felt-sense and thoughts. If wonder is the experience of full embodied presence, wondering is the moment when somatic based sensation moves into thought:

It's almost like a movement between my thoughts and my body. And in my body I am feeling and within a moment of feeling something I then become conscious of feeling it and in that consciousness I am languaging it and when I start to language it I obviously move into that cognitive space again. [J/16]

When I invite him to dwell more closely with what being in wonder is like, John takes a few moments to reconnect with the experience: "I am thinking about it and imagining that I am placing myself in there." [J/21] He slows the interview down by pausing and closing his eyes. What emerges for him in this moment is that: "There is something that happens with my breathing." [J/21] John stays with his experience, closing his eyes to help him focus on what is happening right there in the interview itself. Initially he describes how his attention is drawn towards his "upper body, my chest, my stomach". [J/22] He starts to rub his torso, describing the process as he does:

Up and down ... something about that space, that solar plexus ... [pause] ... above and below ... [pause] ... As I am attuning to it I am more breathing into it, breathing into it helps me facilitate the experience of any changes or any sensations in parts of my body.[J/23]

Breathing is the first autonomous gesture of human existence, our commitment to breathing is what keeps us alive. It is our connection with life. In this moment, John's consciousness of breathing has drawn his attention to his embodiment:

[T]he flow of breathing in, the movement of breathing in it's almost like ... [pause] ... like a cursor, you know on your laptop. It's kind of like the flow of movement of my breath positions my awareness, my felt-sense through my body ... It's a movement, like a scan up and down and it relates to ... let me see ... the movement of my breath ... something like that ... there is a movement to it ... it feels sort of fluid, my breath takes my awareness with it, you know. [J/25]

Conscious breathing facilitates in John a fluid, felt-sense of his interiority. From this place of attunement within he then describes the experience of breath itself: "it's as though it's a breathing in and an exhalation [he audibly and visibly exhales]." [J/29]

Breath mediates between the microcosm and macrocosm. When we inhale we take in the cosmos, when we exhale we give of ourselves to the world. Breathing for John is thus both an intra and intersubjective experience which at the close of the interview he connects with his experience of wonder in a clinical context:

Let me just take a moment ... wonder ... [pause] ... what is coming up for me is wonder has the texture, quality of my breath ... [pause] ... and when I am attending to myself it's about my breathing in and following the movement of my breath into something ... When there is an attention on the other there is very much a breathing into the space in-between as well as there is a breathing into myself. But there is something about the quality and texture of breath and the lightness of breath that seems to shape that experience for me. That is what immediately comes for me ... [pause] ... [J/69]

Breath and wonder both mediate between the threshold of self and other.

The diminution of separation between self and other which has been so strongly revealed in the participants' lived experience of wonder is taken to a new level in Dave's reflections.

I believe in fact the world needs a reconnection with it on a scale that's unprecedented otherwise we are headed on a pretty dark path. So experiences of wonder, I think, helps us

remember our humanity in a universal sense where fragmentation and separation and disconnection, alienation breaks down and becomes unity. [D/12]

In describing the possibilities of experiences of wonder to facilitate “re-connection”, Dave here alludes to a prior state of wholeness which on an individual level we have lost:

I mean we get ourselves into a state of fragmentation when we are what we call depressed or anxious or traumatised or you know, sort of dispirited in other ways. We tend to move into components, parts of ourselves fragment or are not in connection with each other and what I think perhaps what wonder does is it re-engages a whole body experience of those parts where they come back into alignment and remembering their purpose. [D/11]

If wonder is the chief gift of childhood, for Dave its first bestowal is to keep us:

connected to the soma, the body and the body’s ability to apprehend and appreciate and fully grasp experience beyond words, beyond thought, beyond logic. A child is naturally living at that level and adults have to sort of turn off the brain a lot of times in the way children don’t have to. [D/2]

Bringing his focus back to the lived experience of wonder in the therapeutic space, Dave’s description has clear resonance with other participants’ expression of wondering as the process of staying close to an embodied felt-sense of the client. Dave identifies this process as: “what Eugene Gendlin would call focussing to get the felt sense of something and to sense in yourself the felt shift when something moves and transforms for clients.” [D/5] This capacity to stay with the body’s ability to perceive on the edge of awareness Dave attributes to being still connected with childhood wonder. Whilst this focussed being with is not an experience of wonder, it is for Dave one possible condition whereby wonder can happen. Moments of wonder in the therapeutic space have a distinct and palpable quality. Whilst their occurrence cannot be guaranteed, the conditions for their possibility can be maximised:

What makes it so elusive of course, I don’t think it is conducive to control and intent. It’s kind of like trance – right? We can’t magically put someone under our control in a trance but we can maximise the probability it will happen by putting certain conditions in place ...We sort of bring those conditions into alignment and then boom it’s like the spark will happen if the poles are aligned just right. But there is no guarantee. There is never a guarantee. [D/14]

When I invite Dave to describe what the experience is when the “spark” happens, he first identifies it as a moment of perfect congruence when all compartmentalising psychological walls come down and he stands open and transparent before his client. Like Nicholas, this moment of wonder is when an I-Thou relationship becomes manifest:

Well, I think Carl Rogers captures it well when he describes it as all of one piece. You know where inner and outer are congruent or in alignment, I am not hiding anything intentionally from the client, I am not keeping my reactions secret or compartmentalised. I am open and transparent and it sort of empowers and helps make the client more secure in doing the same, being the same – that I-Thou quality comes into manifestation. [D/17]

Taking this experience from the conceptual into the embodied, Dave’s reveals it to be a moment of heightened “somatic, tactile sensory engagement” which offers extra-ordinary therapeutic potential.

I think it is part of what I call sometimes the therapy trance where there is a lessened awareness necessarily of what is going on in the outside world and the whole world becomes that relational, dialogical space where we are both so focussed on what has happened that that this is sort of the world for a moment. So there sort of, a narrowing of consciousness in one respect and yet a widening of awareness on all sensory levels in that relational space where then you are able to notice things you wouldn't notice in a normal, casual interaction in a bodily experience. Little things that the client might be doing in their bodily experience, maybe shared bodily experience you are aware of having. All of these things and to me it is a multi-sensory kind of thing of somatic, tactile sensory engagement. [D/18]

#### **4.5 Theme Three. Being Renewed: The Fresh Revelation of Wonder**

Standing in amazement at Socrates' paradoxes, the young Theaetetus declares: "And I want to know what on earth they mean; and there are times when my head quite swims with the contemplation of them." (Plato, 1986, p.155) Wonder itself is a paradox: it both conceals what is known with unknowing and reveals new knowledge from this unknowing. In his *Advancement of Learning*, Francis Bacon (2013, p.8) encapsulated this paradox when he called wonder both "broken knowledge" and "the seed of knowledge". This sense of wonder as broken is captured in the German form of Wunde (wound), where it becomes an opening through which new knowledge emerges from initial, stunned, amazed, astonished disorientation. Wonder is unknowing, which opens to discovery and creation, and which then has the potential to invite us back to wondering as unknowing. This section is an exploration of the different ways participants disclosed, in their written descriptions and interviews, the essential thread of their experiences of wonder as the revelation of newness. For all these participants, in different ways, wonder reveals things in a new light; reconnects with an newly innocent way of seeing; offers new ways of being; produces new knowledge; welcomes new possibilities; instills new hope and a sense of renewal. In the dialogical space of the therapeutic relationship, wonder is a birthing place for new beginnings.

In this final section of my findings, I foreground the threads of participants' experiences which disclose wonder as revealing newness and weave them into two main strands. The first is *wonder as discovery*. This can emerge from the dialogical process of wondering with their client or from the sudden eruption of a moment of wonder, when new knowledge or new ways of seeing are unconcealed. For Mia, the moment of discovery was the central focus of her attention when exploring her experience of wonder. I therefore draw primarily on her evocative description, pulling in experiences from other participants to a lesser extent to describe wonder's essence of producing new knowledge. The second strand of participants' experience is *wonder as renewal*. Again, I focus largely on a few participants who were especially compelling in their descriptions of how wonder carries within it new possibilities for healing, of feeling alive, of creation, of new hope. In this sense, wonder was understood by these participants as playing a vital role in the therapeutic process.



### 4.5.1 Opening to Discovery

The process of dwelling in the unknown, either in the experience of wondering or in a sudden moment of astonished wonder, eventually opens us to an experience of apprehending newness. As Tony succinctly noted, in his experience of wonder: “there was a sense of, well ... something new was happening”. [T/4] My focus here is to close in on descriptions which disclose how the experience of wonder contains within it the movement towards discovery.

To make a discovery carries the element of the unexpected. We may have been working towards it, but the moment itself always surprises us. Gaining knowledge through a process of phenomenological enquiry is an integral part of each participant’s therapeutic practice. And as earlier sections have described, this process is grounded in a stance of welcoming unknowing: of bracketing assumptions, expectations, agendas and leaving the space open for whatever is to be revealed to reveal itself. Being available for the experience of wonder was a central aspect of this way-of-being with clients. When the profundity of “what is” revealed itself in a moment of wonder, all participants declared their surprise.

Reflecting on when he and Kara witness each other in the face of the magical spectacle of birds outside the treatment room window, Tony describes this as a moment in which newness spontaneously erupted:

You know how we talk in phenomenology about the *epoché* where we create a space and then things hopefully come out of the space, new things come, it was a bit like that ... almost like a space was created in which something different, wonderful, fresh, unknowable but knowable erupted spontaneously and in that I got a different, I met a different Kara and that enabled me to respond differently not in a clinically cold way of oh I can respond differently in this situation but of a human being who had met another human being and that is quite wonderful in itself. That is the layered thing. [T/29]

During his reflection in the dialogical space of the interview, Tony has a moment of discovery himself:

I hadn’t seen that before, it was another view of her and I am thinking intellectually now, an eidetic view, a flash, a pictorial something that came, like I didn’t have that thought at the time [laughs]. [T/32]

His laugh underscores his delight at this unexpected realisation that the moment of wonder which offered him a new perspective on his client had fundamentally changed his perspective. The flash: “gave me a new Kara”.

I sometimes [laughs] have clients where there is a mutual opening where we know each other differently – how to describe that? Wow. You know each other differently, in a way there is thought there but it’s not just thought. It’s got all the different elements if you like. It’s almost as if all the dimensions of existence spontaneously come together and, and that is the change there is an action, a movement, a new sense. [T/39]

The experience of wonder not only serves the therapist, mutual opening in wonder creates newness for both client and therapist. This is an aspect also emphasised by Ruben:

Wonder is a moment ... oh yeah ... something else is coming up from a relational aspect ... wonder also to me is an experience where both of us experience something new. It's not one person revealing something to me but wonder implies that we are both thinking from a dyadic point of view – both are in a space of new territory, new experience, new phenomena. [RU/54]

An understanding of the relational dimension of wonder underpins all of Ruben's reflections and here he foregrounds it as an experience of abundance, gifting both therapist and client with newness. That wonder *gives* is reflected in the way participants described the giving and receiving of their mutual opening with their clients. This is expressed most clearly and simply by Tony: "There is a bodily sense – there was a giving and receiving in a bodily way." [T/46] An essential aspect of this experience of wonder is that it carries the promise of giving.

Whilst the participants can only guess at the benefits their clients experience from a moment of mutual wonder, their written descriptions and interviews are filled with descriptions of the new territories, experiences, phenomena suddenly made available to them. Tony for example is explicit about the new gains of wonder:

Compared to the previous knowledge of my client there was a gain. And we both gained so it was an equal gain. But what did we gain? Well partly we gained something of each other in those moments. I felt there was no ... it wouldn't have been possible to be the same afterwards [laughs] as we were previous. [T/65]

Reflecting on his work with young offenders, Jason also recognises the mutual gains. Even though his clients may not be able to describe the experience of wonder as he does, he is convinced that it is an aspect of their healing:

I suppose that is where a lot of the wonder comes from. When you take into account the desperate situations they have been in and continue to be in a lot of it is about that – it adds to it that they can actually experience that. You can experience that with them, they can experience it ... whilst I am feeling that lovely feeling what they will definitely be feeling is a reduction in horrible symptoms like no more flashbacks starting to disappear, nightmares disappearing, OCD behaviours diminishing ... they have definitely been experiencing that. [JA/74]

Apart from the insight and heightened feelings of pleasure arising from an experience of wonder (ecstasy, love, relatedness, expansion, gratitude and trust), wonder can also gift a new sense of ourselves. In a moment of wonder at his client's catharsis and subsequent unfurling, Nicholas gained access to a new understanding of himself as "a good enough father" [N/27] in the therapeutic relationship. Wonder also revealed to him the forcefulness with which he had been approaching his client and brought renewed appreciation of the importance of not imposing his agendas, however well intentioned: "it was almost a lesson to me – let it be, let it come at its own time". [N/41] For Mia, wonder facilitated her: "reconnecting with myself in a different way and reconnecting with life in a different way to the moments before the discovery". [M/69]

The process of dwelling in the unknown, either in the experience of wondering or in a sudden moment of astonished wondering, eventually opens one to newness. Wonder offers access to new knowledge which shapes the therapeutic process. In particular, the changes which can take place after a moment

of wonder, when new knowledge is unexpectedly revealed, offers an unexpected transformation in the therapeutic relationship. When Ruben and his client “create this moment of wonder in which actual encounter takes place” [RU/68]:

We learn something about this situation and we can understand why that person behaves how he/she behaves. How he/she feels. How he/she makes sense, meaning of her situation in the world. [RU/68]

Reflecting on therapy with Kara after their mutual experience of wonder, Tony was aware that they were now in a new space together.

Something was changed. Yes that changed therapy with Kara and if I ... and so ... I would have to say we were both changed because that did change the way we met afterwards. Not that I didn't experience some stuck places but that it was different erm and we got to a place where she would sometimes arrive and not want to work ... meet me ... in her own place and I would say something like shall I just wait and she would laugh so it wasn't maintainable any longer for either one of us so it kind of broke through it. It was a remarkably useful few moments. [T/33]

Whilst the participants in this study understood the process of revealing new knowledge as a gradual phenomenological process of wondering – of being with the other in open, attuned presence – they also described moments of wonder as sudden discovery. Focussing on this latter aspect, Mia in particular and Nicholas more briefly, evocatively described what wonder is like in its aspect of discovery. What was especially interesting in Mia's experience is how she came to the interview unsettled and almost apologetic that she could not find a single concrete example of wonder in her clinical work with clients but only in the context of supervision:

It was a surprise for me ... I think in the past couple of months I knew I was participating in your research so every now and then I do think about it, about wonder and I was surprised that I don't feel wonder – it's not something I am often consciously connected to. [M/4]

As we started to explore together this perceived lack of wonder, Mia suddenly realised that the wonder she experiences in a clinical context is something in the background of her consciousness which is why she could not initially connect with it. It erupts into awareness, with the quality she associates with wonder as discovery most powerfully during clinical supervision:

It's a feeling more discovering something that was hidden before ... or that I wasn't aware of, there is a moment of opening up to something more ... behind sight ... it's, it's like WOW. [M/6]

I think it comes up when there is a sense of discovery of something, like being let open into something unexpected – there is a sense of discovery and that is why wonder is not always at the forefront of my immediate experience because it usually happens when there is a sense of discovery. [M/7]

Key to Mia's experience of wonder as discovery is the sensation of release: “In moments of wonder there is a sense of release also into something more in life, some aspects that I wasn't open to before, a sense of opening.” [M/29] As we explored these sensations of release and opening to something more, I offered my summary of what I understood her having described. Picking up my use

of the word “surrender”, which more properly captured my own horizon of wonder, Mia replaced it with one which more accurately suited her experience:

That captures except that in this instance somehow your word surrendering, surrendering doesn't fit with this experience of wonder ... the wonder is about emerging into a something, something that was hidden ... emerging into an opening ... surrendering is more kind of settling ... I feel in my body it is more like settling into something so I am still caught up in the moment of experience where I am coming out of something. [M/35]

Wonder in its aspect of discovering something previously hidden is an emergence:

Mia: Yes ... that moment of discovery and realisation is like coming out of darkness.

Paula: coming out of darkness.

Mia: Coming out of darkness, like something was stuck and coming into an opening.

Paula: Into, into an opening.

Mia: Right.

Paula: What's that opening, is there a felt sense of that opening – you have described a sense of release ... is there any other sensation or metaphor that would capture that sense of emerging into an opening?

Mia: Erm .... [pause] ..... To describe the moment of opening I think opening would be like I described before ... the moment of wow.

Paula: The moment of wow.

Mia: The moment of wow ... The moment of discovery, the moment of coming out of some kind of puzzle or stuckness and a sense of relief or release, the physical sense of release ... also ... yeah ... the sort of coming into an opening as in a sense of understanding something I couldn't understand before or understanding something at a deeper level that wasn't available to me before. So I guess the opening would be associated with the relief and release. [M/36-40]

For Mia releasement emerges as the expression of moving towards what is being revealed through the discovery of wonder. Towards the end of his written description, as a reflective summary on his experience of wonder, Nicholas draws on two quotations from Heidegger to encapsulate his experience of wonder in its two aspects: the movement towards things as they become known and openness towards unknowing. Like Mia's experience they centre on releasement:

This experience comes closest for me to a sense of embodying Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit* – releasement or letting be. To surrender to the not-knowing, what Heidegger might describe as *mystery* and to completely accept to “what – is”. It is in that moment, a space and openness emerges in the therapeutic relationship which has an extraordinary power and quality.

“Releasement towards things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way.” (DT 55)

“To let be – that is, to let beings be as the beings that they are – means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself.” (BW 125) [N/63-75]

Nicholas concludes with the observation that when the dialogical space of therapist/client is one of letting Openbe then Being can be disclosed: “Like Buber’s I-Thou it cannot be forced or consciously willed. It is like a rare animal that emerges into a forest clearing and for that brief moment is a wonder to behold.” [N/76-78]

#### 4.5.2 Wonder is Renewing

Within this strand of renewal, images of rebirth, of creativity, of hope, aliveness and healing vibrate. Witnessing the courage and resilience of clients struggling with existence prompts a sense of wonder. Such wonder is not simply a response to this struggle, but opens a path towards healing. As Dave observes, life is full of contradictions: “life and death, being and non-being, light and dark”, but “we don’t need to be tyrannised by the polarity”. [D/43] He offers the experience of wonder as a possible way of reconciling these oppositions by being present with what is:

There is something about [wonder] that grounds us in the here and now and full awareness of the moment of being alive and having this opportunity present right here right now, no better than the present and a moment fraught with angst and creativity ... that bitter sweet grasp onto it and all its contradictions and then it becomes a whole body experience. [D/42]

This sense of being fully present and alive in wonder reverberated through participant descriptions. Ruben, for example, expressed how in the moment of wonder he experiences himself and the other as alive. Wonder for him is “the antithesis of the mood of boredom ... How do I experience the other? Present, alive, that is also important ... When I am in a space of wonder I feel highly alert, I feel very alive.” [RU/18] and his client is similarly: “present, alive, that is also important”. [RU/47]

The way wonder renews and reaffirms a passion for life and fosters deep interest in the other is captured by Ruben’s assertion that wonder is: “The antithesis of the mood of boredom.” [RU/53] In a similar manner Jason realises that:

[P]erhaps my life would be boring without it ... I suppose that’s why I am grateful they share everything and what I get out of it is that sense of wonder and that wonder exists. Its affirming, life affirming because life is not mundane and flat or meaningless. [JA/76]

When Tony described how the wonder he shared with his client brought newness to their being-together, he repeatedly identified the experience as having a quality of freshness:

I don’t think I had seen her smile for instance. So it was a fresh experience. [T/5]

Yes something different, spontaneous, fresh, something shared erm mmm I need a thesaurus. [T/13]

It was something from outside that effectively brought something fresh to us both that we shared ... .and changed how we were together in the therapy. [T/16]

Yes, it was a surprise, newness, freshness er yes. [T/57]

Nicholas also used the word freshness in describing his experience of being with his client after the moment of wonder.

Nicholas: But let me stay with it ... think about it a bit ... [pause] ... so there was something serene, calm, [I]t was almost like after you know the moment after a massive rain or thunder storm and you smell the rain, the sun has come out and it's all slightly warm again and there is a freshness, a bit like that moment after the thunder storm has passed.

Paula: That is a lovely description.

Nicholas: I am a great one for metaphor. I like using metaphor. Yeah. That's how it felt. It's also a welcoming like after the thunderstorm you welcome that moment where the sun comes out again and everything is fresh and damp. Just steaming a bit ... that's odd ... you know what I mean, that sense of renewal, renewal ... yes that's it, renewal, there was something very renewing. [N/7-8]

The experience of wonder calls forth a sense of renewal and the possibility for new beginnings for therapist, client and the therapeutic process. It brings hope in the power of therapy and a renewed sense of belief in the work. Reflecting towards the end of his interview on how wonder taught him the "lesson" [N/41] of genuinely giving up on agenda Nicholas declared: "So there is something to do with hope. Wonder, it gives you hope and faith in the work." [N/41] For Jason, wonder similarly renews his confidence that he is: "on the right track":

It was wonderful to see these psychological processes in action from a theoretical standpoint ... it was wonderful to see that played out. It was quite affirming of the work ... it's all true. [JA/20]

[P]art of the wonder is that I am so pleased I am in the profession and I dare say it ... I am doing something right to have these experiences happening. [JA/69]

## 4.6 Chapter Summary

The lived experience of wonder is complex, multi-layered and difficult to describe and categorise. Through poetic transcription I endeavoured to evoke an essential quality of each participants' unique experiences before integrating these in three main emergent themes: Being open, Being with, Being renewed. My findings disclosed how, in wonder, existential psychotherapists engage a process of contemplative, presence-filled wondering in order to come closer to clients' being-in-the-world. Sometimes – suddenly, surprisingly, spontaneously, an ecstatic, magical, perhaps transcendent moment of wonder happens. Such wonder opens us into an astonishingly intense, love-filled embodied being with, which dissolved barriers and welcomed in previously unknown horizons of knowing, discovery and therapeutic possibility.

# CHAPTER FIVE: WONDER-FILLED DISCUSSION

## 5.0 Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to critically discuss, in the context of the wider literature, the richly evocative, lived experiences of the eight therapists who participated in this research. I begin with Hycner's (1976) dissertation as this is the closest research to my own, in terms of considering wonder in the context of psychotherapeutic practice. In an earlier section of this research narrative I questioned the link between Hycner's findings and the implications for therapy he draws from them. When taking into account his conclusions in the light of findings from my own research however, I suggest that Hycner's vision of a wonder-filled therapy may in fact have some significance for practice. When he proposes that: "A therapy concerned with wonder would be concerned with sensitising a person more to 'being-cognition'" (*ibid.*, p.175), I recall my participants' emphasis on the centrality of presence and the quality of being with which was integral to their experience of wonder. Surrendering a sense of control and opening themselves to the unknown permeated their descriptions, giving concrete expression to Hycner's (*ibid.*) intuition some four decades earlier that:

A therapy concerned with wonder would deemphasize the need for control and security and recognize that the greatest certainty is that we do not genuinely know what will happen next in our lives ... a therapy truly consonant with allowing a sense of wonder to emerge would emphasize the need to be genuinely present to the emergence of the unexpected instead of prejudging what will occur. There is here a great stress on the sense of discovery, on exploring that which is unknown.

Given the importance my participants gave to the realisation of an I-Thou relationship in wonder, Hycner (*ibid.*, p.177) is discerning when he suggests that the philosophy of Martin Buber could be central to therapy which is "attuned to wonderment". Such a therapy, he argues:

would be cognizant that each object, that each person, that each event, is somehow significantly unique and set apart from all our previous experiences and that this uniqueness, which truly addresses us, requires of us a genuine meeting and response. Such a therapeutic approach would be interested in developing a sense of "meeting" as a life stance (*ibid.*).

In the discussion that follows, I acknowledge Hycner's hesitant "sketchings" and the therapeutic significance he recognised in this neglected phenomenon. My intention is to offer a much fuller description and understanding of what it is to be wonder-filled as a therapist.

This chapter is divided into three sections, which explore where the three thematic threads from my research intersect with existing narratives of wonder, offering possibilities for psychotherapeutic theory and practice. Despite these divisions, I am conscious that the richly complex and excessive

nature of wonder does not easily stay within limits, so at times certain discursive threads fray between sections.

Firstly, I examine how the lived experiences of existential wonder, objects of wonder and wondering described in this study resonate with findings from other empirical studies, psychotherapeutic literature and relevant writings in existential-phenomenological philosophy. I pay particular attention in this section to how the participant's lived experience descriptions give expression in a clinical context to the meditative/contemplative thinking described by Heidegger in his later writing. I then turn my attention to the relational/dialogical aspect of wonder by discussing my findings in the context of theories of ethics in the work of Lévinas, Buber and Irigaray. I claim that by fostering wonder there is heightened potential to enhance ethical practice within psychotherapy. My final focus is the creative aspect of wonder identified in my research as promoting new possibilities and renewed action in the form of being able to "begin-again", as described in Arendt's theories of *Natality*.

## 5.1 Lived Experience of Wonder

From the outset of this study, I drew on Husserl's three-fold conceptualisation: *existential wonder*, being engaged in *the process of wondering* and *apprehending something or someone as wonderful*. Relating to his clinical work, Nicholas observed that: "when you try to define something you somehow change it". [N/7] I am keenly aware that by introducing a tripartite structure of wonder, my instructions may have shaped subsequent reflection leading to the emergence of these three categories of wonder in the data. During the interview process, however, most participants at some point entered into a distinct field of wonder as they recalled their experiences. In these moments they described a clear "atmospheric" [N/25] shift taking place from an earlier experience of wondering. Again, this conceptualisation of a shift, described as it actually occurred, may have been influenced by my initial tripartite depiction of wonder, but I suggest, given that the descriptions resonate across participants, the qualitative experience of the three aspects of wonder identified by Husserl may in fact be a feature of the phenomenon as it is lived through.

All participants described with clarity their experience of wondering. For some this was provoked by, or led to, the apprehension of someone or thing as wondrous and /or a moment of intense existential wonder. Whilst recognising the different qualities of wonder, all participants were keen to stress the interconnectedness of their experience: one part flowed into or created space for another to emerge. In discussing these separate aspects in the context of the wider literature, I am attentive to the multi-dimensional, layered complexity of the phenomenon in order to resist a reductive three-fold categorisation.



### 5.1.1 Being In Existential Wonder

In his phenomenological study of wonder, Hove (1996, pp.449-455) makes his explicit focus the intense moment of “existential wonder”, which he isolates from other dimensions. The themes he elicits: “Wonder brings us to a stand-still; wonder leaves us speechless; wonder opens our eyes; Wonder calls to us; Wonder gives things their meaning; Wonder exposes our vulnerability”, have resonance with the experiences of existential wonder described in this study. My participants were invariably left still and speechless. The intense experience of wonder gave a heightened sense of meaning to their therapeutic process and the relationship with their clients. In the mutual openness that occurred in existential wonder, they became vulnerable to the other. Their eyes were opened and they saw their client in a different light. In the sense that wonder evokes deep, compelling, urgent interest in their client, there was the quality of invitation. The paradoxical active/passive dimension noted by Hove (1996; 1999), whereby wonder renders the wonderer immobile and silent yet simultaneously drawn into the experience, was captured in participant descriptions throughout my research.

The emergence of existential wonder is always a surprise. Even when attuned to an attitude of wondering, the moment of becoming wonder-struck always feels spontaneous and unexpected. It is a feeling of not being fully in control, accompanied by excitement and pleasure. In this aspect, I suggest existential wonder was for participants, wonder in its “impassioned state”, as described by Lingis (2012, p.218), whereby “all our senses are enflamed”. In such moments there existed a surging of “excess energy generated within” (*ibid.*) and whilst impassioned states may be transitory, according to Lingis they give rise to a “passionate attachment” (*ibid.*). For the participants in this study, the actual experiencing of existential wonder lasted moments, but the passionate attachment which occurred as therapist and client, were disclosed to one another, had a lasting impact on the therapeutic relationship.

One significant dimension of defining wonder within the literature was how, as an experience, it is similar to or different from other emotions such as being amazed, awe-struck, stunned and astonished. It is with wonder in its existential aspect that participants were most likely to describe themselves as amazed, awe-struck, stunned and astonished. In these moments, participants described being put into contact with something unintelligible: the “unsaid beyond” (Irigaray, 2012, p.20) of the miraculous, the mysterious or the transcendent. There is a rich body of theological and mystical literature which describes the experience of wonder as a connectedness with the divine, and in his study of the experience of wonder among a group of artists, Medlock (2015) described how the emergence of wonder was characterised by a sense of being in touch with spirit. Whilst not using the word “spirit”, participants in my study recognised that there was an “energy” present in the experience that for some had a super-natural quality. This said, at no point were there religious allusions. Their descriptions were more evocative of the sense of wonder which “permits a transcendence that remains *within* the sensible world” (Jones, 2011, p.100). The deeply dialogical experience of being with the other in a moment of existential wonder, described by participants throughout this study, was

evocative of Irigaray's (1993, p.82) description of wonder as: "A birth into a transcendence, that of the other, still in the world of the senses ('sensible'), still physical and carnal, and already spiritual."

"Passionate outbreaks", Lingis (2013, p.220) claims, "carve out space and time in distinctive ways":

They do not take place in a never ending line of time segmented into minutes, hours, and days, nor in the time we experience as stretching back and containing our past actions and encounters and extending forward where foreseen plans and projects are inscribed. Instead the time of an impassioned experience disconnects from the continuum of life and nature. Passion intensely and completely fills a present.

For psychotherapists whose work is generally strictly demarcated in therapeutic hours, when suspended in existential wonder time changed and had less meaning as a boundary of practice. Ruben was clearest on this temporal dimension: "I might not any longer be attached to the social and cultural dimensions that go along with psychotherapy ... you have to do forty-five or fifty minutes ... I don't care about this if I am in an experience of wonder." [R/21] In surrendering to the present moment, there was a sense that normal time was no longer in operation: it was stopped or expanded. There was a simultaneous awareness that this experience was only a moment even if it felt like an eternity. "It's a short lived, short lived experience that might last for a few minutes maybe but that's already long." [R/21] The experience of existential wonder has a paradoxical quality of being both timeless and short lived.

Wonder displaces the space of subjectivity, argues Roesch-Marsh (2003, p.323), opening up "the field of ethics". For the participants on this study, existential wonder was a liminal space – a portal between worlds. In a similar way to its temporality, the spatiality of wonder carried for participants a quality of fluidity. This was especially true of the space-between and the spatial experience of the self. The sense of self which surged in existential wonder exceeded normal limits. Lingis (2013, p 222) argues that in passion "the self arises and takes form in it". Drawing on Heidegger's philosophy of moods, Hansen (2012, p.14) makes a similar observation:

In wonder we witness a world-ing: that is, a world that is coming to be "here-and-now". This makes the I (in Buber's sense) wonder. In wonder, the I comes to him or himself or to the world in which he or she is already embedded.

Existential wonder as described by the participants of this study has resonance with Lingis and Hansen's accounts in so much as their selves come into being, creating a powerfully-held sense of authentic presence. But this was not a separate sense of self. Feeling into the inner space of sensory awareness in wonder they encountered their client. Existential wonder thus revealed their fundamental relatedness/embeddedness with others.

Fisher (1998, p.56) argues that in a moment of wonder there occurs: "a unity that overrides whatever separation between body and soul we might otherwise take to be the norm". This was certainly borne out in the experiences described in my study. Roesch-Marsh (2003, p.310) declares that "wonder is visceral: kinaesthetic. It is an awakening to the Other through the body". On a physical level, existential wonder was experienced as a moment of ecstatic, full mind-body unity signalled by a vibrational, buzzing sensation starting from the heart. This was an embodied lived experience

description which affirms Hansen's (2012, p.14) conclusion that "wonder awakens and enlivens the heart". There was a profound sense of extra-ordinary presence. In existential wonder, participants experienced themselves as awakened to life. All senses were heightened and opened in awareness.

Hove (1997) and Hansen (2012) both quote Augustine, who declares that: "Wonder strikes the heart but does not hurt it." In so much as the findings of this study describe how the moment of existential wonder elicits a simultaneous closing of distance and a profound opening between therapist and client, there is support for the conceptualisation made in the literature that a moment of existential wonder creates a wound or rupture. A space opens for something new to emerge. As Derrida beautifully describes it, "the breach necessary for the coming of the Other" (cited in Caputo, 1997 p.xxv). But within the simultaneous experience of love, trust and safety, which are also described, these "wounds" were, as Augustine observes, without "hurt". Existential wonder, though a powerful experience of awakening and revelation, is gentle on the wonderer.

### 5.1.2 Dwelling in "Genuine" Wondering

In his description of wonder in a psychotherapeutic context, Hycner (1993, p.111) observes:

To prejudge, is to crush the emergence of new possibilities. It is the willingness of the therapist to always be surprised; not because of "naiveté," but because the therapist has not precipitously assumed what will happen. It requires a very sophisticated naiveté and professional astuteness to hold one's own ground, yet be constantly surprised by what is. To do therapy that is truly responsive to the needs of the client, the therapist has to have a sense of wonder; he has to allow himself to be amazed.

The radical openness of existential wonder is spontaneous and always surprising. You cannot compel its presence. But as the participants of my study described, whilst there are no guarantees, with "sophisticated naiveté", you can create the *possibility* for its appearance by engaging in a conscious process of wondering. In his extended study of wonder, Verhoeven (1972) describes wondering as "ritadando", which is a slowing down of the intense state of existential wonder. In contrast to the suddenness and short-lived experience of existential wonder, wondering in my study had a slow, conscious quality. In one of Hove's (1996, p.457) meditations on the contribution of wonder to pedagogy, he writes: "To be receptive to the persistent possibility of wonder may cultivate a manner of being present for students that encourages "true wondering", and wonder, in them." Drawing on his own doctoral research, Hycner (1993, p.111), has written about the centrality of "true wondering" as a state of "genuine openness" in which we bracket our therapist expectations to allow for the unimagined to occur:

This genuine openness to the beauty of the Other cannot occur if the therapist maintains significantly divergent notions of who the client is, or should be. The therapist's expectations of what should happen always interfere with what can happen. What can happen is always far richer than what we expect. What we expect is only the barest hint of what is possible; and what is possible stretches the limits of human imagination.

I suggest that my research offers a careful consideration of how “genuine openness” is lived-through in therapy. “True wondering” by the participants in this study is in part conceptualised by the Husserlian concept of *epoché*. It is an attitude easily claimed, but as my study shows perhaps more difficult to genuinely manifest than generally acknowledged. Just as Hycner noted in his own study that “the recall of wonder is wondrous”, when my participants described their experiences they frequently dropped into wonder at the subtle profundity of the process. It takes courage and honesty to dwell in uncertainty, authentically drop all agendas and risk becoming vulnerable. These are the same essential virtues Hansen and Amundson (2008, p.39) propose are needed if the therapist is to stand in “the openness of wonder”:

This kind of ontological listening and understanding requires, as we have said before, an ability to enter into a community of wonder with the visitor and therefore also a courage to stand and work in this openness. This attitude is also described through the Socratic Virtues of the counsellor, which has to do with caring awareness, silence, ontological humility, courage, humour, self-discipline and friendship

In the mutuality which is such a strong feature of their described experience, the participants in my research entered into “a community of wonder” with their clients or clinical supervisor. The various ways in which they were able to stay genuinely open dominated the interviews of all the participants I interviewed. The experience of unknowing – which Bion (1967) described as being without memory or desire and engaging in a kind of reverie, was a fundamental quality of wondering for all the participants in this study. There were no assumptions that they were being open to their clients. Often, in humility they registered a word or glance from their clients which would indicate persisting agendas. Their wondering revealed itself as a continual process of indwelling to checking within for “memory or desire”, and paying careful attention to the impact their intentions were having on their clients. In this process their experiences echo Irigaray’s (2008, pp.7-8) suggestion that self-wondering fosters an authentic presence which protects the other from harm:

Before wanting to approach the other, it is advisable to wonder about oneself and one’s own manner of dwelling...If we are not dwelling where we ought to dwell, being what or who we are, we are not prepared for an encounter with the other. We are only able to impose on the other our alienation, misunderstanding, or ignorance.

Therapist wondering, as my study has revealed, carries within it a quality of dwelling in unknowing. There are echoes here of the findings from Voller’s (2016, p.35) IPA study into how psychotherapists inhabit uncertainty in clinical practice. What is of particular interest are her conclusions that therapists identified two distinct states: *being in* uncertainty and *being with* uncertainty. The experience of *being in* uncertainty she describes has, I suggest, the stronger resonance with the unknowing of my own participants:

Being “with” uncertainty, as the term implies, refers to a kind of instrumental form of uncertainty. Even though there may be a felt sense of uncertainty in being “with” uncertainty mode, it is a “you” rather than “I” orientated uncertainty because the uncertainty is located elsewhere. For instance, when the uncertainty is related to the situation being grappled with, or a clients’ experience of being in uncertainty. However being “in” uncertainty’ is a qualitatively different mode, it is a personal and more directly experienced mode of inhabiting uncertainty that opens the therapist to numerous possibilities. This could well include experientially touching into the therapist’s vulnerability and existential anxiety, or vicariously experiencing the clients’ world, or be a space for imaginative exploration and play. (*ibid.*)

Voller here points to the therapeutic potential and dangers of dwelling in uncertainty. She implies that uncertainty opens the therapist to being vulnerable and merged in a way that may have a negative impact. The participants in my study, however, described the vulnerability which emerged from deep states of unknowing as opening up new possibilities for the therapeutic relationship. They were clear that wondering (as dwelling in the unknown) at no point led to a sense of fusion – there was a heightened sense of connection whilst retaining a clear awareness of self and other. Significantly, when Voller indicates that being in-uncertainty may lead therapists to touch into existential angst, she misses the opportunity to consider that uncertainty may also lead to existential wonder. The possibilities and play she celebrates, my research suggests, may lie in this fundamental origin.

Hansen (2012: 11), drawing on Arendt, proposes that:

In wonder, we find so to speak, a footing and joy and beauty right in the midst of not knowing. It is neither our knowing nor our intentionality that directs our awareness, but rather Being itself. We have left the epistemological ground for a deeper ontological ground, which we must trust without knowing why.

Trust, beauty and joy are precisely the experiences of being-in the unknowing of wonder which have emerged in my research.

Genuine wondering as a therapist requires us to be courageous as we let go of agendas and pre-established truths in order to meet our clients in an open space of attentive hospitality and contemplative silence. To be in uncertainty can be anxiety provoking, as Voller intimates, but to be in unknowing whilst held by a mood of wonder seems to offer protection against anxiety. In describing a particular moment of his experience, Nicholas reflected that wondering came close to the concept of *gelassenheit* in Heidegger's later writings:

That Heideggarian thing of dwelling and letting be was a lot on mind at that moment. I couldn't, I had no direct contact with him but after his realisation, it was maybe relief on my part and relief on his part that something could be dammed that was being held and that was the release and then the pure silence, a contemplative silence I would say. [N/24]

Like Nicholas, Hove similarly identifies Heidegger's later writings as resonating strongly with the phenomenology of wonder in his research, which he then claims as opening possibilities for education. What emerged very clearly in the findings of my study was the significance and potential all participants regarded an attitude of genuine wondering as a radical aspect of openness has for therapy. Churchill (2013, p.220) makes a similar claim when he argues that:

Heidegger would not have devoted as much time and energy to instructing medical doctors as he did in the Zolikon Seminars had he not thought his new and alternative thinking – meditative thinking – was of essential benefit to all medical therapies. Indeed, if the therapists let themselves be imbued in body and soul with this “new and alternative “way of thinking, they themselves would experience its benefits, primarily in the form of self-transformation. From then on, they would understand themselves as individuals who are called upon to serve all beings, including patients who in their openness to the world encounter the therapist as a place for self-disclosure.

I suggest that the experiences described in chapter four give concrete expression of “this new and alternative” way of thinking in Heidegger’s later writing. It is this aspect of my research in particular that extends the existing psychotherapeutic literature, which claims the importance of wonder as a phenomenological attitude of openness but fails to describe what it is like for therapists “to be a place of self-disclosure”. As Nicholas reflects in our interview:

Again we talk about an open stance but like I said in the thing ... we can try but we can't force it, we can hope and we can sort of think we are being open but are we really being open? In the case of wonder, wonder opens us rather than we open wonder. [N/33]

In his study of the *leitmotif* of homecoming in Heidegger’s later work, Mugerauer (2008) argues for the radical significance of the poetic mode of the philosopher’s writing. Whilst some commentators may have turned from these works as “weak attempts to speak as a poet”, (p.9) Mugerauer regards these works as profoundly significant in the evolution of the ideas started in *Being and Time*:

We find the voice of Heidegger as he begins to learn, not as a logician- metaphysician, but as another, just-emerging sort of thinker, exploring a non-metaphysical theme by learning to hear and speak in a poetic mode and with a poetic vocabulary. “(*ibid.*, p.9)

These later works, Mugerauer proposes, chart Heidegger’s “homecoming” journey through the three historical-epochs (outlined in my literature review) from the mechanisation of the present, back through the metaphysical to the open wondering of the Early Greeks.

The silences and difficulties participants in my study found in communicating the quality of their wondering might, in part, have been due to the difficult journey they were making from a normal scientific, purposeful, intentional, calculative way of thinking that constructs objects to one which captures the attributes of openness – which frees the other from prejudice and judgements. This wondering, I suggest, captures the quality of Heidegger’s “thoughtful questioning” in his later works. They describe their way of being with clients as waiting without intention, the continual process of letting be, the clearings and lightnings, the disclosing and unconcealing of their presence and their client’s, their felt sense of transformation and release. For example:

[T]here is a kind of ... opening ... Kara let me in ... a fraction of a second after she had let the spectacle outside in and I opened in response and then everything, each bit of that triangle witnessed the other in a way ... Kara and I gave witness to each other and the window spectacle so there was a mutual opening. [T/38]

I think wonder opens a more profound or deep sense of openness. [N/36]

The wonder is about emerging into a something, something that was hidden ... emerging into an opening. [M/35]

Holding in this situation is me, holding space opening up a space of encounter of finding out, of the potentiality and waiting is ... less active is more passive. Whilst holding is an active way of dealing with the situation, the waiting part is letting go of activity. It’s passive. It’s exactly not trying to influence the next step. [RU/48]

These references to opening, emerging, passivity, waiting, disclosing are descriptions of wonder which give living expression to Heidegger’s central metaphor for *Dasein* as forest clearing. As a material space, the clearing is a pool of light bounded by darkness, but it is also a field of consciousness which opens as unconcealment occurs. The forest clearing is a compelling image for

the wondering therapist. As a space into which the therapeutic couple enter, the clearing stands for their shared world of experience. But the potential for a clearing is opened by an individual with a particular way of being. This image of the forest cleared by the forester's axe recalls Ruben's reflection that wonder is a "tool" which may lie in his tool box but may not be available to him. Whilst there were no guarantees that they could muster up the mood of wonder, in the experiences described in this study, it was with a stance of wondering that the participants created the potential for clearing an open space where something new and therapeutically potent could emerge.

### **5.1.3 The "Thinging" of Wonder**

"The thing things. Thing gathers" (Mugerauer, 2008, p.455).

"You realise how surprising it is, how wondrous it is that anything exists at all" [RU/7].

Wondering about wonder opens us into a potentially endless, reflexive and disorientating process. Wondering sometimes (not always) led to an existential moment of wonder revealing a thing of wonder that elicited even more wonder and wondering. Or a genuinely wondering process revealed a "thing" of wonder which threw the perceiver into an existential state of wonder. As Husserl's three-fold model of wonder predicted, the edges between the experiences of wonder weave together creating a complex, dynamic process of revelation, relationship and un/knowing.

From the end of the Middle Ages, as trade routes through Africa, Asia and the Americas opened up, the European aristocracy created "wonder cabinets" to display the plundered goods of the colonies (Daston and Park, 1998; Holmes, 2008; Kaulingfreks, Spoelstra and ten Bos, 2011; Rubenstein, 2008). The fact that these were exotic things previously unknown is relevant: they elicited wonder because they lay outside the wonderer's cultural or scientific comprehension. In and of themselves they were not things filled with wonder. It was either the non-existence of prior knowledge, or the suspension of prior knowledge through a process of genuine wondering, which elicited a response of wonder. Thus wonder of the thing is inseparable from the perceiver. In the revelation, the subject/object divide disappears as the perceiver is filled with wonder.

Such dissolution of self/other separation was an essential component of wonder for the participants in this research. A deeply experienced sense of mutuality without loss of self carries immense, transformative therapeutic potential. There is no anxiety or fear in such apprehension of wonder, but love and acceptance of all that is disclosed. Wonder discloses hope and possibilities. Wonder discloses and there is wonder at what is disclosed. The thing of wonder gathers wonder to it, disclosing wonder as a "truth" of psychotherapy for participants. In this, the thing of wonder is never an object. The wondrous thing which the participants of this research apprehended in their psychotherapeutic practice had the quality of a gift. The essence, perhaps, of the thing of wonder in

psychotherapy is its giftness. Wonder imbues the thing – perhaps something ordinary – with a quality of evocativeness that evokes existential wonder or wondering.

To return again and refigure more wonderfully Ruben’s metaphor, “that wonder is a sort of tool in his tool box”, I suggest that some of the therapists in this study discovered they had been given their own “wonder cabinet” of wonderful things which carried immense therapeutic potential. Two of the most striking things which revealed themselves in this study were:

- *The Face of the Other.* For Ruben, Tony and Dave it was the face of their clients which they saw as if for the first time through new eyes following a moment of mutual wonder which left them in wondering amazement. The significance of this I describe more fully in the next section.
- *The natural world.* Central to the experience of wonder described by Tony was the flock of birds shining like baubles in the tree outside his clinic. “I must be a very lucky therapist for something like that to happen”, he declared. Tony was indeed “lucky” to have such wonder enter the therapeutic space. Bringing together nature and existential therapy more consciously may perhaps be a way of increasing the possibility of wondrous luck.

## 5.2 Wonder and Ethics: Opening to the Other

To respond to others in a manner which somehow acknowledges and is congenial with the emergence of wonder should have an explicit place in any relations orientated towards the “good” of the other. (Hove, 1996, p.437)

Nussbaum (2001) argues that it is a sense of wonder which takes us beyond self-absorption. It mobilises our compassion and empathy, making it possible for us to see others as valuable in their own right, rather than simply useful in serving our needs or desires. Wonder, she concludes, is the impulse behind our capacity to preserve the integrity of life, even if it has no immediate connection with our own self-interest. It is the ethical, dimension of my research which I will focus on in this section.

One of the fundamental themes which emerged from this research was how wonder in a clinical context expresses and reveals a deeply connected sense of being with. In reflecting on this dimension, participants frequently described their lived experience of existential wonder as being in an I-Thou relational moment. Presenting a case for the significance of the ethical dimension of wonder for existential psychotherapy, I discuss my research findings in the context of wonder’s figuration in Buber’s relational ontology, Lévinas’ ethics of responsibility and Irigaray’s ethics of difference. The centrality of relationship in their thinking justifies far more space and critical attention than is available here, so I will focus my discussion on the specific dialectic of self and other, as it is revealed in wonder.



### 5.2.1 Martin Buber: I-Thou Relationships

The transformative potential of wonder to draw us away from an egocentric orientation and hear, as Hansen (2010) argues, the “Call of the Thou” in dialogical human relationships is central to the philosophy of Martin Buber. In contrast to the utilitarian I-It relationships of human existence, Buber argues that life also has the potential for encounters which are “characterised by mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity and ineffability” (Friedman, 1955, p.57). In these dialogical, intersubjective meetings, something occurs not merely in the participants but between them, revealing the uniqueness of the other as transcendent Thou rather than an It- an object that serves a function in my egocentric existence.

In its I-It manifestation, the other is experienced only partially, mediated through my past experiences and assumptions. I-It is the everyday nature of our relating: “Without the realm of I-It, we would not have a sense of continuity and constancy across time and place, and without order and utilitarian knowledge we would be lost in a reality without finitudes” (Adams, 2013, p.82). Describing these finite temporal-spatial dimensions of the I-It relationship, Buber (2013, p.82) writes:

He perceives the being that surrounds him, plain things and beings as things; he perceives what happens around him, plain processes and actions as processes, things that consist of qualities and processes that consists of moments, things recorded in terms of spatial coordinates and processes recorded in terms of temporal coordinates, things and processes that are bounded by other things and processes and capable of being measured against and compared with those others – an ordered world, a detached world.

This is the world of the known and representational which stands in marked contrast to the experienced world of I-Thou. The resonance of this experience with the fluid, timeless, uncertain quality of existential wonder described in my research is striking: “measure and comparison have fled”, this world is: “unreliable, lacking density and duration” (Harding, 2012, p.307).

As they described being with their clients in existential wonder, participants realised (often in wonder) that they were describing some of the most profound and complete clinical experiences of what they understood as Buber’s I-Thou relationship. These moments, as described in the chapter four, were characterised by a sense of reciprocity, ineffability, presence, reverence, immediacy, uniqueness, wholeness, and intensity. Describing the inherent potential of all I-It encounters to become I-Thou dialogical relational experiences, Buber sees the two relational dimensions as being dialectical rather than in opposition. This was echoed by the participants who described moving from a functional clinical encounter in which the client was trapped in the therapist’s pre-existing assumptions and agendas, through an increasingly wondering space of deepening openness, characterised by acceptance, trust, safety and love. From this clearing emerged a growing awareness that a moment of existential wonder might happen. This was the moment of an I-Thou encounter. Just as Adams (2013, p.84) describes the futility of therapists “striving for the I-Thou rather than focussing on the conditions for the I-Thou to occur spontaneously”, the participants in this study recognised that striving for wonder was the most certain way to ensure it never happened.

If striving blocked the emergence of wonder and the experience of an I-Thou relationship, participants in this study described how a stance of *letting be* or dropping all agendas facilitated the possibility of both to happen. Such an occurrence was described as a moment of grace in the sense of wonder being unexpectedly and graciously being given without it having being asked or even looked for. These descriptions have a remarkable congruence with Buber's contention that for the realisation of an I-Thou relationship two qualities are required. The first is *grace*, which needs to be present in the sense that the other is not summoned but gives of itself. The second quality is *will*, which Harding (2013, p.305) argues is more properly understood as not doing: "The not doing he has in mind is opening oneself to the grace of the other, an opening up that gives up the drive to assert oneself over against the other."

When these conditions were right, and a moment of existential wonder/I-Thou relating did arise, participants described being opened into full presence before the client, who has been newly revealed to them. In an I-Thou relationship it is not only the Thou who is freed from their utilitarianism. Hansen (2012) reminds that the "I" is not to be found in the "Thou" but in the *relation* between the I and Thou. "I emerges from the relationship as soon as it says 'you'" (Buber, 2013, p.80). In this sense, our existence depends upon our being with. We owe our existence to relationship. Buber argues that the first relation "the womb of the great mother" (*ibid.*, p.76) from which I emerge creates the imprint which calls me to an I-Thou experience:

The prenatal life of the child is a pure natural association a flowing towards each other, a bodily reciprocity; and the life horizon of the developing being appears uniquely inscribed, and yet not inscribed, in that of the being that carries it. Indeed, the child can only exist in this relationship – as evidenced by her dependence on the umbilical cord. (*ibid.*)

In the existential wonder described in this study, the experience of relatedness was fully revealed. It was simultaneously the moment where participants experienced the full presence of I which for Buber is: "as mysterious and metaphysical as the Thou." (Hansen, 2012, p.7)

In the moment of existential wonder, my participants describe their sense of being disclosed as something much more than a therapist other to their client. By becoming Thou for the other, they feel the fullness of their I. In existential wonder, the I of the therapist participants opened into their fullest potentiality of presence and being with. The palpable sense of excess, expansion and flow in the moment of wonder perhaps corresponds to an existential sense of becoming fully I in relation to the Thou coming into presence before them. In the wondrous intersubjective space of an I-Thou relationship, the therapist and client are engaged in the creative possibilities of becoming: "I become, through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou" (Buber, 2013, p.11). This process of becoming, as a happening "between" them, is where the uniqueness of self emerged.

In his writings on the great turning points in religious history, Buber argues that spirituality requires an ability to "receive an experience as a wonder": outside the causal nexus of explanation. Buber recognised that the philosopher and the religious person both wonder at unexpected phenomena (Elkholy, 2012). The difference between them, he claimed, is that whilst the philosopher neutralises wonder with cognition, the religious person "abides in that wonder" (Buber, 1952, p.75). For Buber,

the religious person is one who locates the divine in relationship: the wonder of god reconfigured into Thou as wondrous space-between. To be open to the Thou of the other is to be in the presence of the sacred: "Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou". Whilst none of the participants in my study described their experiences as spiritual, they were unequivocally able to abide in that wonder with their clients.

For Buber, an I-Thou relational experience is a unique event. In a similar way, the participants in this study described how the uniqueness of a moment of existential wonder, which accompanied a profound momentary experience of I-Thou relating with their client, was more rare than they had realised. To be open and present with their clients was not necessarily rare in their therapeutic practice, and they would have previously spoken of these experiences as examples of I-Thou relating. But reflecting on the quality of radical, mutual openness and being with experienced during a moment of existential wonder, participants realised that *this* was what it felt like to be in a fully dialogical, I-Thou encounter. The question this realisation inevitably provoked for participants and myself was whether it was the actual eruption of a moment of existential wonder which created the I-Thou relationship, or whether the experience of existential wonder *emerged* as the most appropriate response to the dialogical profundity of the therapeutic moment they were sharing with their client. The distinction ultimately became irrelevant as they realised that the two experiences of being in existential wonder and an I-Thou relationship were essentially identical and intimately connected.

### **5.2.2 Emmanuel Lévinas: Wondering and the Face of the Other**

Whilst Lévinas does not present a systematic analysis of wonder in the way Heidegger attempted, Roesch-Marsh (2003, p.3018) argues persuasively that the significance and relevance of Lévinas' understanding of wonder is: "a basic motif within his work ... It serves something of a regulatory function: reinforcing, integrating and affirming the cogency of his key terms and leading concepts". One of the central concepts of Lévinas' thinking is his critique of Western philosophy's particular emphasis on Being as totalising and unethical. He argues that ontology is a: "reduction of the other to the same by the interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of Being" (Lévinas, 1969, p.43). Like Irigaray, who takes up this critique of sameness in her ethics of sexual difference, Lévinas argues that such a focus on Being is questionable in that it eliminates the alterity, or otherness, of the comprehended being (Gauthier, 2004, p.156). For, it is through seeing the human face of the other that I confront the other in her/his Otherness. The significance of the face for Lévinas is that it is the most vulnerable, naked, expressive aspect of human presence. Exposed to me in its reality, it resists reduction to an idea or image. Wonderment is this first unreflective encounter with the Other's face which, for Lévinas (1969, p.197), indicates their infinity. The face is in excess of my power to reduce it to a finite entity: "The face resists possession, resists my powers."

In wonder, the Other is prior in that it is apprehended before judgment arises. "The Other is accepted in his/her irreducible alterity, in terms of his/her priority for the subject" (La Caze, 2002, p.4).

Wonderment is important in Lévinas' ethical project, for it arouses an attraction or connection to the Other. In wonder, the subject is decentred and claimed or seized by the Other before the subject exerts its own influence. The place of wonder is thus central to Lévinas' ethics, for the face of the Other calls the subject imperatively into a position of responsibility and accountability rather than violent appropriation. Wonder reveals a responsibility to the Other that precedes knowledge. For Lévinas it is through wonder that the self is awakened by the Other, resulting in: "a taking on of being in the form of an unconditional responsibility for the Other and not simply a marvelling in the radiance of "presence" (Roesch-Marsh, 2003, p.3019).

In my own research, the face of the client is revealed as a thing of wonder. Whilst my participants did not communicate that this wonderment awakened them into unconditional responsibility in the way Lévinas describes, neither was there a sense that the profound experience of mutuality which was realised obscured the Otherness of the Other. Krycka (2015, p.61) has described the potentiality of psychotherapy to give preference to the symmetrical: "in the countless ways we support positivity, finding balance, harmony, equality, fairness or even justice in our practice and the lives of our clients". This tendency, he maintains refuses "to honour the asymmetrical nature of dialogue, of relationship and of our practice." Following Lévinas, Krycka further suggests that this neglect of the asymmetrical "does damage to our capacity to face the Other in our lived world". (*ibid.*)

Whilst the experience of I-Thou relating in my study describes reciprocity, mutuality, equality as a powerful outcome of being in existential wonder, suggesting the symmetry Krycka (2015. p.62) speaks of, there was also an insistence on the alterity of the Other. The paradox of symmetry and alterity was at the heart of the experience of wonder on witnessing the face of the client. Navigating the "dichotomous notions of sameness and otherness" for Krycka is at the heart of the psychotherapeutic process, which leads to a "genuine meeting":

Genuine meeting has the capacity to reverse the "given" asymmetries fostered by culture and our profession and unsettle them. In genuine meeting, the client and therapist can come to a good enough resolution of the built-in power asymmetry of the therapeutic relationship, leading each to eventually honour the Other for their unique status and power ... Meeting demands that we not perceive the other person in ways that reinforce sameness or distinctiveness" (*ibid.*, p.63)

The descriptions which emerged in my research were of how participants simultaneously experienced profound reciprocity *and* the uniqueness of the other. These moment of existential wonder had the power to deeply unsettle opening an experience of genuine meeting which, as Krycka argues, is "generative of therapeutic promise" (*ibid.*, p.63).

### **5.2.3 Luce Irigaray: An Ethics of Difference**

It is Luce Irigaray, feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst who, I argue, has perhaps taken up most clearly the potential of wonder in promoting a relational ethics, which retains difference and resists the

violence of symmetry warned by Lévinas. Irigaray's primary project is a critique of the psychological, philosophical and linguistic structures which perpetuate one-subject Western androcentric culture. Exposing, in *Speculum of the Other* (1985), the matricidal tendency of Western philosophy and Freudian Psychoanalysis, Irigaray argues that the concept of two sexes is a myth in the sense that female subjectivity has been reduced to the self-same of masculinity. Woman functions in Western culture as mirror to the male subject who can then experience himself as objectified and complete. Until there is a female subjectivity which is distinct from the masculine, Irigaray argues, there can never be an ethical relationship between the sexes.

Irigaray's project is not simply deconstructive, however, her work is equally focussed on the generation of strategic interventions designed to create a world: "more conducive to the flourishing of subjects other than the masculine one" (Khader, 2011, p.9). Irigaray's focus on sexual difference and the exposure of matricide at the heart of Western culture has been criticised for essentialism and a normative heterosexual bias which neglects other forms of subjectivity (Grosz, 1994). Sympathetic commentators on her philosophy, however, claim Irigaray's philosophy has relevance to difference more widely (Alfonso, 2011; Chanter, 1995; La Caze, 2004). Whilst a fuller discussion of how Irigaray sees the significance of sexual difference in terms of the subjects' lived experience in relationship to themselves, other subjects, the physical world and the divine, are beyond the focus of this study. What is of relevance here is the significance she gives to wonder as the "passion of not-knowing" in her ethics of sexual difference. Irigaray (1993, p.75) argues that wonder as radical openness is the centre of an ethical way of relating that has "not yet assimilated or dissimilated as known" otherness. The relations of those who differ, she argues, need to be worked through wonder.

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray draws on Descartes' postulation of wonder as the first passion to propose it as the basis for an ethics which recognises difference. Wonder, Descartes (1989, p.56) argues, is "a sudden surprise of the soul" or mind calling our attention to a phenomenon, object or person. We apprehend – or are moved – by the other in this moment without judgement. That "before and after appropriation, there is wonder" (Irigaray, 1993, p.74), underpins Descartes' positioning of wonder as the first passion preceding other emotions. It is from this originary passion that the individual adopts subsequent relative positions: "magnanimity or pride, and of humility and baseness!" (*ibid.* p.75). Following this logic, Irigaray argues that wonder provides a model of relationship to the other.

This other, male or female, should *surprise* us again and again, appear to us as *new, very different* from what we knew or what we thought he or she should be. Which means we would look at the other, stop to look at him or her, ask ourselves, come close to ourselves through questioning. *Who art thou? I am and I become thanks to this question.* (p.74)

Reminiscent of Buber's dialogical space between self and other, wonder for Irigaray is the intermediary, third space of attraction which recognises and acknowledges the value of the other *and* separation, which recognises difference:

Attracting me toward, wonder keeps me from taking and assimilating directly to myself. Is wonder the time that is always covered over by the present? The bridge, the stasis, the

moment of *in-stance*? Where I am no longer in the past and not yet in the future. The point of passage between two closed worlds, two definite universes, two space-times or two others determined by their identities, two epochs, two others. A separation without a wound, awaiting remembering, without despair or closing in on the self? (*ibid.* p.75)

Irigaray here insists on wonder as the interval, the space-between that allows a relationship which does not result in one collapsing into the other. Whilst Irigaray is here describing the encounter with the opposite sex as taking place in wonder, my research suggests its applicability as a description of the phenomenological attitude of wonder appropriate to the psychotherapeutic couple. Even when individuals are similar in terms of class, gender, race, sexuality, religion etc., as Krycka reminds us, we are we are fundamentally strange to each other. Extending Irigaray's analysis, the desire to see the other as similar to me means I make sense of their lived experience, embodied presence by projections which reduces difference: "The perspective of the other can too easily be represented as the self's other represented to itself - its fantasies, desires, and fears" (Young 1997, p.45). As the participants in this study have described, an attitude of wonder as a passion for not knowing, fundamentally resists the merging projection of self onto other.

Whilst they empathically attune to the other through a process of wondering, the spatial interval of existential wonder very clearly foregrounded difference and uniqueness. As Jones (2011, p.5) has argued:

The passion of not knowing, wonder, calls on us to value others in their irreplaceable uniqueness and difference, without imposing our own frameworks of understanding so as to make them more familiar, or more like us. Wonder allows us to let the other be, as other, and to value their otherness. The cultivation of wonder provides us with a guiding principle that ensures we neither annul nor appropriate the existence of the other.

Whilst acknowledging this appeal of wonder as a guiding principle for reciprocity between self and other, Young draws on the philosophical tradition of suspicion of wonder to point out the potential dangers inherent in Irigaray's passion of not-knowing:

This concept of wonder is dangerous. It would not be difficult to use it to imagine the other person as exotic. One can interpret wonder as a kind of distant awe before the Other that turns their transcendence into a human inscrutability. Or wonder can become a kind of prurient curiosity. I can recognize my ignorance about the other person's experience and perspective and adopt a probing, investigative mode toward her. Both stances convert the openness of wonder into a dominative desire to know and master the other person. (Young, 1997, p.56)

For the participants in my study, the potential for wondering to become voyeuristic curiosity was indeed a real danger. It was the presence of love which holds open curiosity and prevents desire to know from dominating the other. In a similar way, it is the history of working therapeutically together, creating a sufficient level of trust, care and love which meant that when a moment of wonder emerged with clients they are seen anew but never exoticised. When Jason and Nicholas, for example, marvel at their young clients' ability to sustain relationships despite their previous experiences, they are not exotic Other, but manifestations of the capacity of the human being to exist in relationship and love.

Returning to Descartes' declaration that wonder is the first passion before other emotions emerge, if an ethical relationship is to develop from wonder as the initial response to difference, how is it

possible to *stay open*? In his article “Wonder”, Hepburn (1980) acknowledges the negative potential of wonder identified by Young, but also asks what happens when we begin to step out of wonder. Is it possible to maintain over time the reciprocity wonder engenders? For Tony, when the moment of existential wonder he shared with Kara had passed, its effect on the relationship continued. He could no longer see her in the same way again, and knowing he had seen her smile, Kara could no longer maintain a way-of-being that was joyless. The profound depth of an I-Thou moment may be transient, but its presence in the relationship leaves its ongoing trace. Proposing an affinity between wonder as an “other-acknowledging”, “non-exploitative, non-utilitarian” attitude, and other moral attributes, Hepburn suggests that compassion, humility, gentleness and respect are only “a short step away” (p.15) from wonder. These attributes, he suggests, offer us a way to stabilise the openness to difference, wonder engenders. In all the descriptions of wonder in this study, these are the qualities, indeed perhaps the conditions which create the very possibility for wonder to emerge in the first place.

#### 5.2.4 Wonder and Breath

In bringing together the various strands which have revealed themselves in this discussion of the ethical dimension of wonder, I focus on the significance of one embodied quality of the experience described in my research – that of breath. In his reflection on wonder, the eighteenth-century philosopher Adam Smith described his distinctive bodily experience: “that staring, and sometimes that rolling of the eyes, that suspension of the breath and that swelling of the heart” (Smith, 1987, p.26). Breath is what connects the limits of our life. Our first breath signals the moment of independent life:

Breathing corresponds to the first autonomous gesture of the living human being. To come into the world supposes inhaling and exhaling by oneself. In the uterus, we receive oxygen through the mother’s blood. We are not yet autonomous, not yet born. (Irigaray, 2002, p.73)

Our last breath is the signal of our death. Wonder too has the power to literally take our breath away (Bulkeley, 2005; Burton, 2015). It is a deep inhalation which echoes that first breath in which we encountered the world anew. Recent commentaries have begun to pay attention to the potential epistemological significance of breath in developing a radical philosophy of ethics (Green, 2008; Nair, 2007; Škof, 2013, 2015). “Breathing is ultimately transcendence in the form of opening up to the other person” writes Roesch-Marsh (2003, p.322) describing how Lévinas’ ethics of responsibility for the other is epitomised in the embodiment of breath. Wonder reveals a responsibility to the other that precedes knowledge. For Lévinas, it is through wonder that the self is awakened by the other resulting in: “a taking on of being in the form of an unconditional responsibility for the other and not simply a marvelling in the radiance of “presence”. (*ibid.*, p.319.) For Lévinas, inspiration means I take in the other and when I expire the self empties: “a coring out of my substantiality” before the face that commands it. This, as he describes at the end of *Otherwise than Being* (1998, p.323), is: “*the wonder that has been the object of the book*”:

To open oneself as space, to free oneself by breathing from closure in oneself, already presupposes this beyond: my responsibility for the other and my aspiration by the other, the crushing charge, the beyond of alterity. That the breathing by which entities seem to affirm themselves triumphantly in their vital space would be a consummation, a coring out of my substantiality, that in breathing I already open myself to my subjection to the whole of the invisible other, that the beyond or the liberation would be the support of a crushing charge, is to be sure surprising. It is this wonder that has been the object of the book proposed here.

The significance of breath in human existence is a theme which has resonated throughout Irigaray's writings, becoming its central focus in her more recent work. In her critique of the underlying thesis of Heidegger's philosophy – that what has been forgotten in Western philosophy is Being – she argues instead that what has been forgotten is air, signified by breath. It is an unrecognised “place of all presence and absence” and “no presence is possible without air” (1999, p.7).

When John began to describe his sensory experience of wonder, he declares it has “the quality of breath”. Whilst his was the most explicit association of wonder and breath in my research, other participants spoke of the connection and paralinguistically registered its presence through marked exhalations and inhalations during their recalling of their experience. John's experience, I suggest, lacks the quality of being “emptied” before the other, which is integral to Lévinas' conception of breathing. It evokes more the possibilities of Irigaray's philosophy of breath as an ethical, non-violent way of meeting the other in newness. His process of inhalation and exhalation gives John access to a sense of how he dwells in his body in the way of wondering Irigaray (2006, p.44) describes:

Before pretending to meet the other as other, it is necessary to wonder about oneself and the way in which one dwells. It is necessary to ask about one's own dwelling. If we do not live being what and who we really are, we are not prepared for an encounter with the other. We are only able to impose our alienations, misappreciations or ignorance on the other. To open a threshold in order to meet with the other requires that we are dwelling where we exist as ourselves, and by ourselves.

Wondering for John involves attending to his inner felt-sense and becoming empathically attuned to his client. In this immediate, physical encounter, distance disappears. When he notices that breath is also “in-between” he exposes the myth of the void between self and other – we are always in connection through breath/air: “We are in a space that is already occupied by air: two things cannot take place in the same place elsewhere other than the place of air” (Nair, 2007, p.44). In making this fundamental association of wonder and breathing, John describes how wonder is an experience that offers the possibility of full embodied awareness with a movement across the threshold of self into the unknown, the unfamiliar of the “in between”. As with inhalation, wonder receives, welcomes the other to cross the threshold into the interiority to know them in an embodied sense – a “not yet (en)coded” (Irigaray, 2006, p.44), pre-cognitive knowing. Wonder facilitates the other to be welcomed whilst ensuring her/his novelty is preserved. The possessing, or collapsing of difference into similarity is resisted by the cyclical movement of inhalation and exhalation. The experience of wonder for John is about being an embodied presence with an open willingness to bring the other intimately close and then release her/him with new awareness. Perhaps, as Vasalou ponders: “dwelling in wonder is merely a matter of learning how to breathe” (2008, p.196). In his phenomenology of wonder and



mindfulness retreats, Hove (1999, p.115) also connects wonder and the “rhythm and textures” of breath:

Within the eruption of wonder, one’s participation in the habitual movement of thought, the continuous surface of experience, endures a marked rupture or crisis. That which we assume, seek or desire is arrested, yet the character of this arrestation is not a stasis but an open, *empathetic attentiveness*. The stop which dispatches us to the present, and leaves us with what *is* present, is not a conclusive ending. Rather, it more closely resembles the rest which is situated precisely in the middle of movement, as we find it in the unwilled rhythm and textures which define our *breathing*.

Whereas Irigaray argues that Heidegger has “forgotten air” with his focus on mother-earth and father-fire in his conceptualisation of dwelling, Škof (2012, p.105) suggests that in Heidegger’s later thinking, there is in fact: “a sensitization towards breath and thereby opening a fissure or crack through which “a breeze from the east” as we might conceive of it, gently blows through his philosophy, especially in his advocacy of contemplative thought. In this sense, the descriptions of wondering contained in this study could be read as examples of mindful-ness based practice with its roots (in part) stretching into the contemplative practice of Zen Buddhism (Biernacki, 2015; Schneider, 2015). Here, wondering exists in the form of a willingness to engage in a constant process of self-reflection in order to resist being trapped in thought. This process of self-reflection was clearly evident in the wondering of most of the participants in this study, even if it was not described as a mindfulness-based practice. To wonder seems to open naturally towards a therapeutic practice which is carried on a “breeze from the east”. The mindful wondering described in this study, I suggest, reveals the therapeutic potential Heidegger (2001) imagined when proposing his “new and alternative thinking” at the Zolikon seminars.

### **5.3 Wonder and Natality: The Capacity to Begin – Again**

Central to Heidegger’s description of Being are the twin poles of the facticity of birth understood as our thrownness into life and the finitude of our death. Locating himself firmly in Western philosophy’s “necrophilic tradition” (O’ Byrne, 2010, p.4), Heidegger (2000, p.374) focussed primarily on our orientation towards the limit of death as Dasein’s main way of being: “Factual Dasein exists as born; and as born, it is already dying, in the sense of being-towards-death.” This insistence on the theme of death left Ricœur (2004, p.357) to puzzle:

Does not the Angst that places its seal upon the always imminent threat of dying mask the joy of the spark of life? .... Must one not then explore the resources of the potentiality of being before its capture by being-towards-death?

Whilst the anxiety provoked by the inevitability of our being-towards-death might awaken us from inauthentic everydayness, to turn towards our birth is to re-connect with the creative, generative principle that arises from our thrownness into a world which we have to make our own. Throughout the project of his thought, Heidegger identified wonder as the fundamental mood of beginning, but

argued it was an ancient mood more available to the modern age in its inauthentic form of curiosity. Countering Heidegger's underplaying of the human task of beginning –of birth- as it is caught in the mood of wonder, Arendt turned to the possibilities of the originary spark of birth as a "resource" throughout life. Drawing on Augustine's evocation of the wonder of Christ's birth, Arendt points towards the fundamental principle of new beginnings available to us all simply by virtue of our natality. As she says in *The Human Condition*, it is in our beginning not our end that human possibilities for action lie:

To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, "to begin," "to lead," and eventually "to rule" indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are propelled into action. [*Initium*] *ergo ut esset, creatus est homo ante quem nullus fuit* ("that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody"), said Augustine in his political philosophy. (Arendt, 1958, p.177)

In his study of fundamental moods, Held (1993, p.294) has argued that wonder: "distinguishes itself from all other moods by the fact that it harbours within itself the force to institute the beginning". Held has proposed Arendt as the thinker who has most fully developed this possibility of wonder into a philosophy of action. He argues that in her theory of natality she describes freedom which: "consists in the fact that I have the possibility to deviate from pre-given patterns of conduct and to begin something new" (Held, 2005, p.2).

In making death the key boundary of our existence, and granting the accompanying existential mood of angst as the main catalyst for an authentic existence, Heidegger missed the potentiality of birth. In contrast, Arendt proposed that: "natality is a philosophical category that enables us to make sense of the possibilities of new beginnings, freedom, and interrelationships in a finite and gendered web of life" (Arendt, 1958, p.96). The lived experiences described in this study, I suggest, give expression to how wonder reveals the potency of this aspect of natality: "the force to institute the beginning" in psychotherapeutic practice for both therapist and client. Building on Arendt's theory of natality – the wondrous capacity of human's to begin-again – Held (1993, p.298) argues that in his one-sided emphasis on angst, in *Being and Time* (2000), Heidegger failed to fully understand the significance of wonder in its authentic aspect, which Held describes as awe-inspired: "In being with, this awe is the refusal to want to take control over the radical individualisation of the other in the authenticity of his ability-to-begin" (Held,1993, p.298)

Awe as a radical openness to/creating space for the other-to-begin Held calls love. He offers an invitation to tune into a love-based wonder to encounter the rebirth of the other. One of the striking aspects of my research was how participants' lived experiences of wonder disclosed a discourse evocative of natality. Wonder, for example, revealed itself as a birthing moment in Nicholas' description of how his client was initially curled into a foetal position before emerging in a moment of mutual wonder, when he (Nicholas) became the "good enough father" [N/27]. There was also Tony's description of his finding "a new Kara" [T/32] after their shared experience of wonder. John's

description of wonder as having the quality of breath, as I suggested above, evoked the significance of inspiration and the maternal breath. One of the striking features of this research was the gender imbalance of participants: seven men to one woman. In such a small sample, drawing representational inferences is irrelevant, yet I was interested that this theme of natality emerged during analysis so potently among the male participants. Whilst none of them described a process of dialectical Socratic questioning designed to arouse a sense of wonder (Hansen, 2012), some descriptions were so evocative of attending a birth that I was reminded of Socrates' declaration of himself as a midwife of the soul:

My concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth. And the highest point of my art is the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a young man's thought is a false phantom or instinct with life and truth. I am so far like the midwife, that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom; and the common reproach is true that, though I question others, I can myself bring nothing to light because there is no wisdom in me. The reason is this: heaven constrains me to serve as a midwife, but has debarred me from giving birth. So of myself I have no sort of wisdom, nor has any discovery ever been born to me as the child of my soul. (Plato, cited in Kierkegaard, Hong and Hong, 2013, p.513)

The space from which wonder arose for participants in this research was temporarily, like for Socrates, a profound sense of unknowing where their own ideas were debarred. Where insight arises for these therapists, it is in the service of their clients not themselves. Unlike the space of unknowing arising from the dialectical questioning which Hansen describes, there was no demand by these therapists for their clients to be rendered – like the student Theaetetus – into unknowingness, although many of them were already lost or stuck. The space of genuine wondering as an open space of unknowing inhabited by the therapist was a sufficient condition for wonder's possibility, which Socrates acknowledges when he says: "the delivery is heaven's work and mine" (Kierkegaard, Hong and Hong, 2013, p.513). Whilst none of the therapists in this study described wonder as being a gift from heaven, they did recognise that the delivery was not simply their own work. As I described above, in my discussion of Lévinas and Buber, if there was divinity at play in creating wonder for these participants it was from the dialogical, mutuality of an encounter with the divine in the human other.

Held (1993, p.294) takes Arendt's work as celebrating wonder as the mood: "from which Dasein receives the readiness and the strength for latent fundamental moods to become authentic". This study, I suggest, offers examples of wonder in its authentic aspect. In their descriptions of how wonder created a space of deeply relational, mutual being with their clients, the psychotherapists in this study were fully present to the new beginnings of their clients. Through descriptions of re-birth, newness, creation, first breath and loving parenthood, my research revealed the possibilities of wonder in the creating of new patterns of relating, therapeutic change, renewed conviction in the power of the therapeutic process and a sense of hope. Thus "the openness of a new human existence becomes possible" (Held, n.d., p.7).

Whilst Ruben describes the wonder of being with his patients who are dying, no-one can die for us, so ultimately we die alone. In contrast, unlike death, our natality is intrinsically relational. Being born –

“the naked fact of our original physical appearance” (Arendt, 1958, p.176) – always involves the physical, visceral contact of another – the maternal body. Countering implications of biologicistic essentialism, Arendt (1958) maintained that the wonder of naked physical birth is only one aspect of the originating principle of natality. The second aspect is that we are born linguistically:

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance (*ibid.*)

A striking aspect of the experience of wonder described throughout this study was the way participants found themselves at the limit of language. In both the therapeutic space and research encounter they reached into an intersubjective realm of embodied presence as they sought to bring tacit knowing into words. Searching for a theoretical model to describe these intuitive, experiences of being in wonder, participants spoke of it resonating with Gendlin’s (1978) indwelling process of focussing on the edge of awareness. Dwelling in this unknowing space of wonder, participants became present to their own bodily experience. Tracing this intangible, felt-sense, they were able to body forth language into conscious awareness. It could perhaps be argued that the experiences of wonder described by some of the participants in this study enacted Arendt’s second birthing into language.

#### **5.4 Comparative Wonder: Inner and Outer Space**

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. (Kant, 1993, p.169)

Around the same time that I began my enquiry into the inner space of therapists who attune to wonder in the inter-subjective space of the therapeutic encounter, Gallagher *et al* (2015) began their study of inner space which has been stirred by the wondrous apprehension of earth from outer space. Their study was published after my own data had been collected, analysed and described. Despite the differences in how we have categorised the lived experience of wonder, the resonance between the thirty-four categories identified by Gallagher *et al.* and the findings from my research is clear. The significance and type of connection, wonder-filled participants experienced in both studies was strikingly similar. For example, Gallagher *et al.* (p.29) emphasised “[f]eeling connected with something without losing distinction” whilst Nicholas described how: “It wasn’t like a merging but erm ... there was a lot of complete connection.” [N/10] A wider, profound sense of totality and oneness identified by Gallagher *et al.* was also clearly present in the experiences described by my participants. Dave perhaps most powerfully communicated this dimension: “So experiences of wonder, I think, help us remember our humanity in a universal sense where fragmentation and separation and disconnection, alienation breaks down and becomes unity.” [D/12] The trance-like, altered states of reality, which accompanied the lived experience of existential wonder described by my participants, resonate with the dream-like category proposed by Gallagher *et al.* Dave’s description reveals this aspect of wonder

most clearly: “And what would that be if not a changed state of consciousness you know because we don't walk through life in our normal waking consciousness experiencing the world that way.” [D/20] The experience of floating as both a bodily sensation of weightlessness and of floating in the void are quite specific to the lived experience of space travel. Nevertheless, this quality was also present in the descriptions given by participants, when they spoke of feelings of expansion [D/47; RU/12], of the “upward movement of wonder” [T/43], fluidity and flow [M/70; N/LED/8; RU/12; T/26; J/25]. That the lived experience of wonder in space-travel was communicated through the concept of floating in the void is evoked in my study by participants’ descriptions of dwelling in unknowing. Given the theme of natality which emerged in my study, this image of floating in the void also finds expression in my study through potent foetal images. For a fuller comparison of findings, see Appendix 15. These similarities, I suggest, offer validation of my own study and indicate the potential of a wider application of my findings beyond psychotherapy.

## **5.5 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have examined how the lived experiences of existential wonder, apprehending something as wonderful, and the process of wondering described in this study, resonate with findings from other empirical studies, psychotherapeutic literature and relevant writings in existential-phenomenological philosophy. I have described how my research has confirmed and extended findings from these other studies on wonder, providing concrete evidence from my research findings to illustrate the key themes of ethicality and natality which have been suggested by other authors as arising from the experience of wonder. I have suggested that when the phenomenon of wonder is experienced in a psychotherapeutic context it carries powerful regenerative and transformative potential.

# CHAPTER SIX: CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE WONDERING

## 6.0 Introduction

As I reach the end of this investigation, what has stayed particularly alive for me is the quality of connection I experienced with each of my research participants. I am reminded of van Manen's (2014, p.206) observation that the essence of a good conversation is less about what is being said and more about "a certain mode of togetherness, a certain way of sharing a world, of experiencing a shared sphere". In this sense, my interviews were good conversations, whereby we wondered together and shared a sphere of wonder. We spent time in silence and somehow found words to describe our experiences.

My intention from the outset of this project was to adopt a conscious, reflexive self-awareness throughout the entire process, but I discovered that when wonder is the fulcrum around which research is organised, there is such a heightened sense of the relational and dialogical that reflexivity becomes an ethical imperative. Going forward throughout this chapter, I use reflexivity in the sense of "critical self-reflection" described by Finlay and Gough (2003, p.ix):

Reflection can be defined as "thinking about" something after the event. Reflexivity, in contrast, involves a more immediate, dynamic and continuing self-awareness. We use the term critical self-reflection here in an attempt to capture both poles of reflection-reflexivity continuum.

Finlay (2008) identifies five variants of reflexivity: introspection; intersubjective reflection; mutual collaboration; social critique and ironic deconstruction. She describes that whilst some researchers choose to focus on one type of reflexivity, others "embrace several of the variants valuing both the experiential and critical dimensions" (*ibid.*, p.16). The phenomenon of wonder called me into such a reflexive embrace.

Adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research has required me to take up different aspects of reflexivity depending on the stage of research I found myself inhabiting. The second and fifth chapters emerged from a sustained reflection upon the place of my research topic and subsequent findings in the existing bodies of the wider literature. My third chapter demanded that I engage a reflective process to make transparent my methodological process. Themes of wonder, which are the focus of chapter four, only became apparent through a deeply reflexive process of interviewing and data analysis. In this chapter, I make reflexivity my explicit focus, foregrounding some of the many ways it has permeated the production and presentation of my research.

I start with an initial description of my heuristic introspection: how prior experience and understandings shaped my personal horizon of wonder and the subsequent interview process.

Turning towards the intersubjective dimension of being reflexive, I consider how wondering as a method encouraged me to adopt a way of being with participants which drew on my experience as a phenomenological therapist. As discussed in my methodology chapter, I did not formally collaborate with participants in the sense of validity checking or positioning participants as co-researchers. But in the sense that lived experience descriptions of wonder were in part co-created between myself and participants, I consider that this necessitated a reflexive awareness of the collaborate nature of this aspect of my research.

All relationships are produced by the social context in which they exist. In the previous chapter, the issue of how participants suggested wonder promotes a radical sense of equality between themselves and their clients was explored. I turn, in this chapter, a reflexive glance to how the power dynamic between myself and participants was brought into focus by our dwelling together in wonder during the interview process.

Given the highly experiential dimension of finding myself in a state of wonder during and after interviews with participants, I also employ in this chapter what Doane (2008) calls "*reflexivity-as-presence*". This aspect of reflexivity describes the experience of entering the abyss or mystery of participant experiences, of "self-abandonment", and of willingly opening oneself as researcher to being affected by participant experiences. Reflexivity-as-presence attempts to express what it is like to be in full attentive presence: "beyond reflexive analysis, beyond the act of stepping back, beyond interpretation" (Doane, 2008, p.100). I suggest that wondering as a research method calls on such a dimension of reflexivity of presence.

Reflexivity honours the recognition that the meanings I produce are always contingent upon my being-in-the-world-with-others. In adopting a reflexive approach, I am conscious from the outset that this research is designed to be read and evaluated for its integrity and evocative resonance with the experience of particular others. Reflexivity is therefore a response not only to attending how I am with participant others, but making my process transparent for those as yet unknown reader others. Their (your) imagined presence has shaped my way of being with this study in my commitment to describing the way my research is necessarily shot through with "unconscious motivations and implicit bias" (Finlay, 2002. p.225). If wonder, as I suggest earlier, has an open, invitational quality then reflexivity does not take attention away from the phenomenon under investigation, but in fact enacts this open invitation by welcoming my readers as fully as possible into the research journey I have taken.

This chapter concludes with a final reflective evaluation of what I understand to be the strengths and limitations of my study, as well as considering the contribution I see this research making to existential theory and clinical practice, and offering suggestions for future research.

## 6.1 Introspective Reflection

Wondering as a research attitude resembles the charting of waters without the help of a magnetic pole as point of reference. It requires continuous strategic self-awareness to understand where the project is going to prevent falling into the depths of ever-seductive epiphenomena. (Lobo-Guerrero, 2016, p.8)

The call of wonder has been a lifelong refrain, which finally found its focus in this research project. My first significant reflexive task was to engage in an extended period of heuristic introspection in order to disclose my own conceptual horizon in relation to this phenomenon. My personal lived experience of wonder is suffused with preconceptions, beliefs and values out of which my research question finally arose. Placing attention onto my own clinical experiences of wonder in the form of written descriptions, ahead of inviting participants to do the same, disclosed emergent themes and concepts which gave me further access to the meanings I held about the phenomenon I was about to study (see Appendix 7).

Reflexively tracing my horizon of wonder from the outset of the research process enabled me to become attentive, during the review of literature, to when my conceptualisation had been transformed and to the ways my orientation towards certain authors or topics was limiting the search and preventing my opening to new horizons of wonder's possibilities. Maso (2003, pp.49-50) describes this as the experience of "forced reflexivity" which happens in "confrontation with the literature".

Research is an act of discovery and my research journal offered an important resource in mapping my responses to the literature I read – not simply my critical engagement but also my emotional responses, such as excitement at new revelations or anxiety when existing literature exposed and challenged the position I was currently holding (see Appendix 16). Genuinely staying open to the various writings on wonder I encountered, rather than looking for confirmation of my existing standpoint or being seduced by a particular idea I was secretly wanting participants to validate, demands an ongoing level of mindful awareness and intellectual honesty. One particularly clear example of this occurred early in the research process. Whilst my stand-point as a feminist is a fundamental aspect of my being-in-the-world, I did not, from the outset, approach my investigation as an example of "feminist phenomenology", as others (Simms, 2009; Young, 2005) have identified their work. Nevertheless, when in my early reading of the literature I became aware of the relationship being drawn to Arendt's theory of natality and wonder, my attention was ignited. It was a shock therefore when it became clear to me that all but one of my participants were men, and the solitary woman was not a mother. Whilst my feminist standpoint is not rooted in biological essentialism, I was confronted with an awakening realisation that through my reading I had begun to develop fantasies about the more explicitly feminist directions my research might take. I journaled and bracketed these desires and could see they were taking me from the phenomenon of wonder and allowed me to become as open and curious as possible to the directions of wonder in which my participants would take me.

It was astonishing, therefore, when I began to analyse my data and see the language of birth, the maternal body and newness, begin to emerge. I checked my interview transcripts and was reassured



that I had not in fact initiated any of the images or concepts into the dialogue. My prior understandings no doubt meant I was able to resonate with the theme as they revealed themselves, but having no mothers among the participants meant that I was wonderfully surprised when it began to spark into my awareness.

The initial stage of introspective self-reflection was therefore acutely important when I entered the data collection phase. Such reflexivity enabled me to be alert to when my stance of openness fractured and my own bias threatened to shape the dialogical process and emergent data. This is very different to the co-creative process I later describe. Reflexivity into such moments of fracture occurred in two main ways. Firstly, in the way I noticed I had dropped an equalising stance of horizontalisation and begun to focus on words or concepts that particularly resonated with my own experience or interests. The second way was how, without due awareness, I would introduce one of my own lived experience-of-wonder words rather than staying close to the participants' language. These moments were invariably preceded by an embodied feeling of urgent excitement but when the words were spoken aloud there was a palpable jarring sensation or self-consciousness which alerted me to this being about me not them. What was interesting was that even though my words were intrusions, they invariably seemed to act as catalysts for participants to describe their own experience more clearly. During my interview with Mia, for example, she picks up my use of the word "surrendering" and reflects on why it does not capture her lived experience:

Paula: So there is a surrendering to possibilities, the openness, nothing is defined and fixed even when you have a realisation that doesn't close down into something fixed either that still has the space of well, who knows maybe tomorrow it will change. This is not a fixed answer but a realisation in the moment, that there is still possibilities that may emerge .... does that capture some of what ...?

Mia: That captures except that in this instance somehow your word surrendering, surrendering doesn't fit with this experience of wonder ... the wonder is about emerging into a something. [R/43-M/35]

In a similar way, Dave rejected my conceptualising of wonder as an attitude but took the opportunity to develop why it was a term that did not fit his experience:

Paula: So there is that sense of wonder as a feeling, wonder as an attitude- an opening, a wondrous attitude leaving yourself open to the possibility//

Dave: // aha

Paula: //of this emerging, occurring between you.

Dave: I identify it as a feeling experience primarily erm attitude sounds more cognitive and thought oriented to me and whilst there are certain attitudes that are conducive to it, I don't experience it with the experience per se. [R/22-D/23]

My participants' challenges to my interpretations in these examples not only revealed my horizon but acted as a form of validation that the words which they did use were indeed thought-through and evocative representations of their experience of wonder.

## 6.2 Reflections on Interviewing

My understanding of reflexivity as intersubjective reflection has been informed by Finlay's (2002, p.215) description of the "negotiated nature of the research encounter", whereby mutual meanings emerge from within the research relationship. The process, she argues is more than simply reflection: "instead a radical self-reflective consciousness (Sartre, 2001) is sought where the self-in-relation-to - others becomes both the aim and object of focus." Drawing on examples from the interview transcripts and my research journal, this section shines a reflexive lens on how language was dialogically co-created and how silence in the intersubjective space conveyed meaning.

### 6.2.1 The Co-Creation of Language

Perhaps due to the conscious foregrounding of wonder as a phenomenon at the limit of language, there was a heightened attentiveness by the participants to the words we both used. Dwelling with the interview transcripts, I became aware of the dialogical co-creative process which occurred during the interview, where I tentatively introduced a word as if, drawing on Gendlin's (1987, p.76) phrase, from "the edge of awareness", which participants subsequently affirmed as capturing their unspoken meaning. My words surfaced into consciousness from a felt sense generated by a strongly-attuned empathic presence with participants. Proceeding these moments of revelation was a feeling of being deeply alongside each other, partners on a journey of mutual discovery where it did not matter who found the linguistic sign to point us in the direction of wonder. This emergence of "right" language from the relational space we were sharing was in clear contrast to the situation described earlier, where I inserted words into the dialogue from my experience alone. For example, after Tony had described his moment of wonder with Kara, I was left feeling quite overwhelmed by the beauty of the experience and shared this with him:

Paula: I am open mouthed actually in response to you describing that moment.

Tony: Are you?

Paula: I am ... am ... just the beauty of it.

Tony: Beauty is an excellent word because there was certainly beauty. [R/30-T/31]

In my interview with Jason, I am similarly moved by a strong emotional sense which, when I disclose, he affirms its accuracy in that moment, takes it up and develops his description:

Paula: There feels a lot of love whilst I am listening to you Jason. You have talked about love earlier and I am just really sensing it's very loving.

Jason: It's a good word for it. It does capture that overwhelmingly nice feeling ... it's quite illuminating and a little bit ecstatic ... like a moving outwards. [R/63-J/63]

Similarly, as Ruben described his vulnerability in opening to another, I was struck by the unspoken trust that must have existed for that experience to emerge:

Paula: Deep trust in that moment.

Ruben: Trust that is the word, thank you that is exactly what I experienced. That is wonderful, wonderful, that's exactly what it is. The trust was the base on which I was able to experience wonder. [RU/28]

My understanding is that this experience of finding the right word from initial unknowing via our relational inter-subjectivity communicated essential qualities of the phenomenon of wonder that both myself and participants were re-connecting with during the interview. From the edge of awareness, words which emerged between us carried a new resonance which often surprised the participants and led them to new thought.

## **6.2.2 Silence in the Intersubjective Space of Wonder**

Whilst exploring the limits of language as they described wonder, the presence of silence in the participants' experience was both described and experientially present in the interview. Three of the experiences of wonder described in this study occurred with clients who were silent during the initial therapeutic encounter. For all participants, the actual moment of wonder occurred in a silence, which was somehow different to any proceeding silence. When, for example, Nicholas talks about how the quality and the shape of silence changed during his experience of wonder – that it felt more “deep and profound” [N/59] or “pure” [N/24] “between himself and his client – he evokes a sense of silence being so much more potent than simply an expression of the limitation of language in describing perceptual experience. Merleau-Ponty (1969, p.248) observes, that there is no silence which is separate from language and equally no language not woven from” threads of silence”. What Nicholas' description of pure, deep, profound silence evokes in this example is not absence or obscurity signalling loss or lack of language, but an evocation of silence as a possible originary out of which thought and language arise and then return to.

Mirroring the silence of their lived experience descriptions, silence was also a significant feature of the intersubjective experience of the interviews themselves. There were frequent moments of silence where participants were lost for the right words to describe their experience, but there were also sometimes extended moments of silence that were – like in the example below – full of presence and significant in conveying meaning about wonder without words. Responding to my invitation to describe his experience of wonder as an opening, Tony was initially thrown back into reflecting on how difficult it was to find the words for me. As a space opened up between us, where language was failing, the realisation dawned on me that the experience with his client he was describing had occurred in silence. That this was significant in some way only struck me at this moment:

Tony: To describe it now? [laughs] There are several levels I am experiencing right now ... it brings it back quite forcibly, it's extremely difficult ... it feels somewhat hard to share with another party namely Paula and that is another reason I chose this as I knew it would be ok, I have no doubts about this is ethically so this allowed me to do it and it does seem extremely difficult to describe and I am thinking how can I get this across to someone not in the room? I suppose ... the words are not really sufficient ... did I say that?

Paula: Yes, you said no amount of words could express your experience adequately. It was interesting that this happened in complete silence by the looks of it.

Tony: It did. Yeah. [silence 20 seconds] [T/58-59]

In the silence which emerged between us, I went through a number of experiences which were especially heightened as this was the interview conducted without video. As a therapist, I am comfortable with being in silence with a client, but as a researcher with a participant whom I had never met before, this felt different. Tony's "It did, yeah" felt like both an affirmation but also a closing down of conversation. We had been exploring how difficult it was to find sufficient words to describe Tony's experience to me – that whilst there were no explicit ethical prohibitions to drawing on this client work, there was still something problematic in this process. In the silence, I initially felt like an intruder: that I was asking him to describe something quite profound which had occurred with Kara, his client, and that the significance of the transcendent experience was only now emerging for him. For a moment I registered a flicker of panic that he might decide to withdraw that consent. Breathing out, I settled myself and dropped into acceptance of what was happening – and let go of attachment to being able to use this data. Thereafter the silence felt respectful. I felt a sense of profound gratitude that he had worked so hard to share this special experience with me, and whatever occurred next I had been given an insight into something extra-ordinary. As the silence continued, I had a glimpse into how potent the non-verbal space between himself and Kara must have been. As soon as I recognised the meaningfulness of the silence, which I had hitherto ignored, I offered Tony my reflection:

Paula: There was no words in this at all but something communicated to you both without words.

Tony: Those few moments were without words but at the end there was communication. [R/60-T/60]

The silence between Tony and myself was equally as full of communication – the fact that no point did it occur to me that the silence indicated we had lost contact. Even though we could not see each other, I was aware of his presence through hearing the steadiness of his breath.

### **6.2.3 Reflexivity-as-Presence**

Central to John's description of wonder was his attunement to both himself and his client, which enabled him to begin discerning the unspoken: what there is in awareness prior to language. During our deeply dialogical interview, this precise process took place. At one point, using his breath as a "cursor" [J/25], John closed his eyes and began to attune to himself. Whilst he had, in closing his eyes, initially disengaged from me, at this same moment I felt myself responding with a similar quietening of myself, a "stillness of my thoughts" [J/15], as John had described. I became aware of my

own breathing, my own being in the room and being with John. I experienced a centring of myself together with a simultaneous sense of embodied expansion. In the same way Jason described his experience of wonder with clients, I felt that the distance between myself and John had closed.

The initial anxiety I had carried that this ineffable phenomenon of wonder may be out of our reach disappeared. I felt fully present and open to both the experience and the heightened wordless connection between us. When John asked me what I was feeling, I was jolted into a self-consciousness, which was in sharp distinction to the earlier sense of connection, where the spatial boundary between us had disappeared. This was especially surprising as the interview took place via Skype, and so the distance between us was significant geographically and materially.

Early in the interview, John had described how for him wonder is “often a shared experience ... a way of communicating or hearing somebody else through my embodied awareness” [J/19]. I had been concerned that my frequent use throughout the interview of my lived experience word “openness” would somehow affect John’s exploration of wonder. In fact, as other participants did, he was able to see this word revealed an aspect of my meaning about wonder and only picked it up when it felt appropriate to his experience. Rather than him being influenced by my experience, what occurred instead was my being “taken over” by John’s understanding of the phenomenon. This may have been so strong because of some resonance with my own experience of wonder in a clinical context, but during our interview a liminal space opened up in which I experienced wonder in the deeply embodied, relational sense I heard John describing. In the dissolution of difference and distance between us, we met as equals enquiring together. When he suddenly enquired of me: “Are you feeling anything now?” it was clear that the power to ask questions about the other’s experience was as possible for John as it had been for me.

On the one hand this level of attunement felt exhilarating, but as a researcher I also felt it so intimate that I was momentarily unsettled about whether I was being unprofessional by being so open. The experience of intimacy gave me direct access to the realisation of how, in being open to the possibility of wonder, professional boundaries are tested to the limits. Reflecting on a particularly deep experience of wonder, Ruben also described a feeling of disquiet directly afterwards when he needed to check in with himself as to whether the clinical experience he had just described had been ethically sound. In situations where we are lost in wonder and in a state of mutual openness, there is always the potential risk of boundary violation.

My repeated experience whilst interviewing was that though I often felt lost, uncertain, vulnerable and open in the sense of my interviewer’s role, in those brief moments of wonder, which occurred at some point in most of the interviews, I was in fact opened in a deeper way to the actual phenomenon I was researching. The experience I desired was not in the words of my participant but now in my own lived experience generated by this profound dialogical, intersubjective encounter. These were the moments Hycner (1976) alluded to, but did not fully explore, in his own study when he claims: “The recall of wonder is wondrous.” One of the research questions Gallagher *et al.* (2015, p.7) ask is whether it is possible to replicate in an experimental setting the lived experience of astronaut awe and wonder?

Recognising moments in my interviews when the recall of wonder became wondrous offered me opportunities to investigate the phenomenon in-the-moment. By adopting a wondering method – characterised by openness, presence, trust and acceptance – we were able to create the possibility for existential wonder to re-emerge in an experimental setting.

Doane (2008, p.94) has described this experience as reflexivity-as-presence: “one that involves an attentive dwelling, a deeply relational presencing through which it is possible to access another mode of consciousness and thus realm of knowledge”. Most of the participants in this study described being in wonder with their clients as authentic experiences of what Buber called I-Thou relating. In the recall of wonder, the research relationship had something of a similar quality. In these moments the phenomenon of wonder was disclosed in a similar way to the description, given by May, of “unitary experiences”:

The idea of experience or perception without the presence of the experiencer or perceiver is untenable in Western thought ... Even so it is just as true that consciousness-without-content contains no perception, no experience, no anything. And yet it is not a state of nothingness. Everything is there, immediately present and absolutely clear. Perception occurs, but without anything being perceived and without anyone perceiving. (May, cited in Doane, 2003, p.98)

How to capture, as a researcher, the knowledge which is accessed in these moments of full presence is challenging. Because John directly invited me to share with him my experience I was able to hear my tentative description when playing back the recording directly after the interview. It was very much at the forefront of my consciousness when we stopped recording, so I took a few moments to jot down thoughts which I returned to and expanded when I replayed the tape. During the analysing of Ruben's transcript, I suddenly found myself transported into a powerful, almost trance-like state, in which I felt a profound experience of wonder. I was literally stopped in my track. But rather than simply being in that state, I decided to write exactly, without reflection, what I was experiencing (Appendix 17). Writing as stream of consciousness prompted by reading Ruben's words lasted only a few minutes in total, but gave me direct access to and the fullest record I had of my own experience of phenomenon of wonder. Whilst recognising that there would have been an impact on the emergent moment, if I had taken the time whilst interviewing participants to do something similar when wonder struck, I might have had a much richer account not simply of my experience of wonder but what it is to be in wonder as a researcher of wonder. Doane describes this same dilemma arising from her own experience as a researcher. How is it possible to be in the phenomenological space of presence and simultaneously engage in a reflective process of writing? She suggests having two researchers – one to interview and one to be in that opened space of availability and “self-abandonment” (*ibid.*). This solution would help ensure that in a space of open wondering potential boundaries are held in place. When however, a phenomenon, such as wonder, is not only generated by the emergent, dialogical presencing of researcher and participant, but becomes the experience of the relationship itself, then it would need an equally attuned co-researcher to continue the interview whilst the other is writing.

## 6.2.4 Mediated Presence: Reflections on Using Skype

A single interview took place with us both physically co-present. Six of the interviews were conducted via Skype-with-video and one participant was interviewed using Skype-to-phone. Apart from a few short episodes of ten to fifteen seconds during two interviews (Dave and Nicholas), transmission for all the interviews was problem-free. These brief technological “ruptures” interrupted the flow of conversation but did not disturb the overall researcher-participant connection which had been established. There was a strong sense of each participant being willing to overcome technological obstacles in order to explore the phenomenon which was of interest to them.

There are conflicting opinions with regard to whether rapport in research – understood as “ease in interaction and a working consensus” (Weller, 2012, p.6) – is facilitated (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014) or hindered (Seitz, 2015) by using technology to conduct interviews. My experience in this study was that regardless of how the interview was conducted, high levels of rapport were quickly established, even with participants I had not previously known. I suggest that this was due to a number of factors:

- The written descriptions created a concrete focus – a shared frame – for us to directly engage with from the outset. This gave us both an opportunity to relax and become mutually interested in their experiences before opening the dialogue more freely.
- Our professional training and experience as phenomenologically-orientated psychotherapists gave us a shared language and philosophical perspective. Participants were familiar with and comfortable with my phenomenological approach to questioning. They frequently anticipated that I was going to ask them: “can you describe that more for me?”
- The nature of the phenomenon of wonder and the process of wondering together promoted connection.

What is lacking in mediated technology is a co-present embodied connection. As I have described in earlier sections of this research narrative, an embodied dimension was explored in all interviews by drawing attention to the physical experience of participants (and one occasion myself) in the here-and-now of recalling wonder. To compensate for the fact that using Skype-to-phone with Tony meant I could not see him, I more frequently asked for his immediate felt-sense experience and found myself paying much more attention than with other participants to his tone of voice, breathing patterns and pace of speaking. The fact that a tangibly felt co-experienced moment of existential wonder emerged in both the Skype and face-to-face interviews indicated that primarily using mediated technology did not compromise the quality of my data.

### 6.3 Reflections on “Writing-Up”

I reflect quite a lot when I was writing down your er exercise and erm I think that it helped me to realise I can stay with myself and wonder about what I have done right or wrong without judging myself and be open with myself. [A/1]

Actually that thing of asking to write, when you said just a couple of lines but then I really enjoyed that invitation to reflect and write a bit. I think that your research benefits from having both the written reflection and the interview. It gives you a more rounded take ... for me it's been an invitation to play and think ... to dwell on a topic. [N/44]

Rather than simply being a stage of research in which “I write up my data”, the practice of writing has been integral to my phenomenological enquiry. As van Manen (2006, p.715) describes, “The writing of work involves textual material that possesses hermeneutic and interpretative significance.” For example, the process of re-presenting participant lived experience descriptions and interviews in poetic form called on me to pay attention not simply to the content and manner of participant communication but to how their wonder stirred me. Writing my own heuristic accounts of wonder and analytically engaging with data through writing served both an interpretive and disclosing function. Language as re-presentation always carries the trace of absence, and in the context of wonder, language was tested to its limits. Writing made that tension apparent. Invoking Blanchot, van Manen (2014, p.178) argues that “writing creates a space that belongs to the unsayable”, and perhaps more than any phenomenon wonder also belongs to that space of the unsayable.

Throughout this report I have described the poetic dimensions of wonder and this understanding has haunted me as I write this. Just as my participants worried how they might write in a way which would capture their experiences, I have doubted my ability to re-present the richness, complexity and unknown-ness of their experiences. Reflecting now, I wonder have I adequately written for pathic understanding. In other words, does my re-presentation of my participants' experiences create a sense in the reader of finding oneself in the mood of wonder in a clinical context? I am aware that in choosing to produce a document which conforms to traditional structures of doctoral research, I have imposed a logical interpretation which possibly does not do justice to the indeterminate, excessive, “saturated” (Marion, 1996) nature of the phenomenon of wonder.

Jason describes how it takes courage to be a therapist in wonder. I suggest it takes courage as a researcher to foreground wonder as a methodological approach. Reflecting on the identity I represent in this document, I wonder how comfortable it is for me to describe feeling lost and reveal experiences in which I am open and vulnerable, even though I disclose my situatedness to foster greater integrity. I am left wondering if my courage failed me in this final writing. Have I sufficiently stressed the full extent of the open, dynamic nature of my experience or have I contained this aspect to present a coherent and competent researcher identity?

Foregrounding wonder as a topic and methodological approach led to interviews which were deeply relational and co-creative. Yet, the approach I took stopped short of taking a more collaborative approach to analysis and ultimately I have chosen to impose a single authoritarian voice in representing this research. In her article exploring her own use of “wondering as a method”,



Loyttyniemi (2005) struggles with how to “concretize” in her writing the dialogical process. She “solved the problem” by deciding to address the participant in her writing as a *you* in order to “expose the dialogic nature of myself and my knowing”:

*You* emphasizes the dialogic, contextual and embodied nature of knowledge. *You* emphasizes the relational that continuously reforms both you and me. Writing *you* concretises the dialogic position that I as the author am willing to take with regard to my heroes, that is, my interviewees so that their internal freedom and indeterminacy is affirmed. From that position, Bakhtin writes the hero “is not ‘he’ and not ‘I’ but a fully valid thou, that is, another and other (...) I.” (*ibid.*, p.91)

Whilst I adopted this approach when writing my own lived experience, I chose not to adopt this in any representation of participant interviews. Instead I offered poetic transcriptions as a bridge between heuristic enquiry and participant experience. Poetry foregrounds my position in the interpretative process, invites readers to create meaning and provokes in me a greater sense of attunement. Nevertheless, I am left wondering if I could have more resonantly evoked the experience of wonder which was so deeply dialogical had I eschewed a less traditional narrative and representational style.

#### **6.4 Concluding Reflections on Validity and Quality**

Conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study which used a small sample of participants, I aimed for research characterised by depth rather than breadth. There are always limitations in accessing pre-reflective experience during research, so one of the key strengths I see in this study is that I was attentive to the immediacy of lived experience when wonder emerged in the actual process of the interviews. This contributed to my developing a rich and complex descriptive understanding of what it is for existential-phenomenological therapists to experience wonder in a clinical setting.

All research involves making methodological choices which impose limits on the study and therefore impact on the nature of the findings. In choosing the hermeneutic phenomenological approach of van Manen, I intended to produce a rich, deep and hopefully evocative lived experience descriptions of wonder. Hansen (2012) has pointed out, however, that one of the limitations of van Manen’s approach is that it lacks a sufficiently dialogical dimension and promotes the notion of the solitary heroic researcher. Whilst the interview process I adopted was intensely dialogical, by choosing to eschew a participant checking process my approach was even less dialogical than that of van Manen, who advocates the researcher entering into hermeneutic dialogue with her participants around emergent meanings. Whilst I engaged in ongoing dialogue with my supervisor, I acknowledge that this was a limited space of encounter and that my interpretative process might have been even deeper had I created from the outset a formal dialogical research group such as Halling and Leifer (1991) describe or Gallagher *et al* (2015) establish, with the explicit objective of fostering dialogue around my findings and analysis.

Throughout this study, I have drawn attention to the ineffable quality of wonder and the struggle both my participants and myself had in bringing the phenomenon into language. The possibilities of language to evoke wonder was therefore one of the limitations of my study. This was especially the case as I had chosen a methodology which foregrounded discourse and writing. Whilst I emphasised the poetic as a way of approaching this ineffability, it is possible that had I also embraced other representational forms in both the collection of data and presentation I might have been able to come closer to the phenomenon of wonder. For example, I could have invited participants to add images to their written descriptions, use art during the interviews, play music or use movement in order to help them convey more fully the experience of wonder. Opening my research to the potential of the arts beyond the written and spoken word might have overcome a limitation in the potential of my study to be as evocative as it could have been.

### Reflective Summary of Research Strengths and Limitations.

#### *Strengths*

- Findings confirmed, reproduced and extended those of similar studies.
- This study addresses a previous gap in the literature by increasing our understanding of the lived experience of wonder in existential psychotherapy.
- The study reveals wonder in both lived experience terms and research methods. The study captures the experience of wonder as it revealed itself in the immediacy of the research encounter.
- There is a strong dimension of reflexive and ethical awareness throughout the study.

#### *Limitations*

- Using words, spoken and written, to describe an ephemeral phenomenon has its inevitable limits. Using other forms of creative expression in my analytical process and with participants might have generated richer description and insight into the experience of wonder.
- Given the shared existential orientation of the researcher and participants their co-created generated descriptions and meanings may not be as resonant to practitioners of other therapeutic modalities.
- Whilst the use of mediated technology generated rich data there were some interruptions to the flow of conversation and visual presence. Given the highly embodied nature of the findings, I would recommend future enquiry into wonder be conducted in direct physical presence to explore even more fully this dimension of the experience.
- Analysis was only limited to dialogue in a supervisory dyad. A wider dialogical community of wonder might have opened up more layers of meaning-making.
- There was a marked gender imbalance in participants of this study. The particular mood of wonder revealed in this study is thus distinctly weighted towards male lived experience. This could be seen as a possible limitation of my study. I would be interested in how the findings from another study might be different if there is a more even spread of genders or includes participants with a more fluid gender identity.

In chapter three I outlined eight criteria which provide a framework against which, I suggested, the quality of my study could be measured. I conclude here by indicating how I addressed these various principles.

1. Keeping close to the data: the importance of fit

Analysis was an ongoing, fluid, and cyclical process of interaction with the research data, which took into account my own position as researcher and the context in which the enquiry took place. I maintain that the emergent themes I have identified are congruent with the data, and the processes by which I define these themes has been clearly stated.

2. Theory integrated at diverse levels of abstraction

As described in an earlier section, theoretical rigour was achieved by this project having methodological coherence. My intention was to ensure that the phenomenological philosophy which underpins this study had been integrated throughout.

3. Reflexivity

In conducting hermeneutic research, a self-reflexive stance is integral to any enquiry, including my own. My reflexive research journal recorded the assumptions I brought, as well as my response, to and influence on, the research process. I have included evidence of this reflexivity within the study.

4. Documentation

As described earlier, I have provided a clear auditable paper trail of documentation to account for the decisions taken which shaped the research process and eventual findings.

5. Theoretical sampling and negative case analysis

When comparing different participants' lived experience accounts of wonder, I was attentive to and recorded how individual cases challenged and modified prior conceptions creating new knowledge.

6. Sensitivity to negotiated realities

Hermeneutic phenomenological research necessitated my opening up to the lived experience of participants. By paying attention to and recording how our diverse realities inform our positions in relation to each other, I ensured that the phenomena of wonder, and the interpretations made, formed a key aspect of the research data. At all stages of the research process, I was attentive to the influence of how power differentials in particular played out in the research process. Journaling around this topic was important to increase my own reflective awareness.

## 7. Transferability

An important factor supporting the validity of this study is the transferability and relevance of the findings both within and beyond the context of psychotherapy. I discuss this in the next section of this chapter.

## 8. Artistic dimension

The eighth criteria: *the artistic dimension* (Finlay, 2006) became highly relevant to this study. Van Manen has argued that phenomenological descriptions, in their vividness and richness, should evoke “in readers the phenomenological nod in recognition” (1990, p.27). This *nod*, from the reader, I would suggest, is an important aspect of verification in phenomenological research, and I hope to have evoked this in readers of this study.

## **6.5 Implications for Clinical Practice, Theory and Research**

### **6.5.1 Introduction.**

Whether configured as a mood, emotion, passion or attitude within psychotherapeutic and psychological literature, wonder remains a relatively un-examined experience. I regard the most significant contribution my study makes is in filling this research gap. It offers the first phenomenological description of the lived experience of wonder in existential phenomenological psychotherapy. Whilst this in-depth research was a small scale study offering a distinct focus on the transformative, therapeutic potential of therapist wonder, the findings demonstrate a remarkable resonance with other qualitative studies into the phenomenon in other practice contexts (Gallagher et. al., 2015; Hove, 1996, 1999; Hycner, 1976; Medlock, 2015). I suggest therefore that as well as carrying potential for developing psychotherapeutic theory, practice and education my research findings and discussion offer a perspective on wonder which might have wider theoretical transferability.

My intention is that this study, together with ensuing articles and presentations based on my research, will provide sufficiently rich and evocative descriptions of wonder to provoke reflection and dialogue among therapists and educators on their own experiences of wonder. In this section I outline various ways findings from this study may have professional and political implications: encouraging an ethical approach to psychotherapeutic practice which is sensitive to difference; promoting relational depth; fostering therapist well-being; extending the knowledge base underpinning existential psychotherapy; inspiring a more experiential approach to the education of phenomenologically orientated therapists and clinical supervisors; promoting hope in times of global uncertainty and terror.

## 6.5.2 Wonder and the Therapeutic Relationship.

Research consistently points out that it is the quality of the therapeutic relationship which makes the significant contribution to psychotherapy outcomes (Norcross and Wampold, 2011). One of the key findings of this research is that wonder has a transformative effect on the therapeutic relationship. As I have described in various chapters of this study, different theorists have argued that relationships based on wonder come closest to Buber's I-Thou way of relating or Lévinas' apprehending the face of the other. My research affirms this perspective on wonder and makes a unique contribution to the literature by offering rich descriptions, from a therapist's perspective, of the therapeutic potential inherent in being undefended, vulnerable, responsive, deeply open to and opened by the presence of the client. When wonder enters the clinical space we recognise the interdependence of beings. In wonder we are decentred as therapists with radical implications for practice: inter-subjectivity isn't simply a theoretical standpoint but becomes our lived reality when the emergent moment of wonder fully catches our attention. In such moments the self is disclosed as always a self-in-relation. I suggest therefore that there is significant therapeutic value in relationally oriented psychotherapists giving due attention to moments of wonder in their clinical practice. These are potent moments of relational promise which could also be given more significance in therapeutic education.

A recent recommendation for practice emerging from the American Psychological Association's study of evidence based research in therapeutic relationships is that: "practice and treatment guidelines should explicitly address therapist behaviours and qualities that promote a facilitative therapy relationship" (2011, p.275). Drawing from the findings of my research I suggest that one therapist behaviour and quality which could be recognised and nurtured in training is that of being able to dwell in wonder. This is perhaps especially the case within phenomenologically based psychotherapies which call for practitioners to adopt a wondering attitude in their practice.

One further recommendation drawn by the American Psychological Association (2011) was the importance of "studying conditions that maximize clinical expertise (rather than focusing primarily on limits to clinical expertise)" (p278). Whilst wonder can emerge spontaneously at any moment, it is also an ephemeral phenomenon which cannot simply be willed into presence. Nevertheless, as was made clear by the participants in this study, there are conditions which appear to make the emergence of wonder more possible: the therapist's capacity to dwell in uncertainty; trusting what arises spontaneously; be undefended and relationally courageous; being willing and able to tolerate boundlessness; being comfortable in inhabiting the liminal spaces of intersubjective relating; the letting go of judgements, agendas and assumptions; bringing a mindful/meditative awareness of their embodied being-with the client; recognising the interdependence of existence. These are conditions which can be brought to awareness in the education and professional life of therapists but also perhaps something to be acknowledged as qualities to be valued and fostered outside the clinical space.

### **6.5.3 Wonder and Therapist Well-Being**

If I'm not amazed at least once during a session, that's an indication to me that I'm either "burned out," or I'm not in touch with a larger sense of what is going on for this person, and between us. (Hycner, 1991 p.112)

There is a significant body of literature on the vulnerability of psychotherapists to Burnout Syndrome (Lee, et. al., 2011; Maslach, 2001; Puig et.al. 2014) and vicarious trauma (Figley, 1995; Sexton, 1999; Stamm, 1995). In the context of describing the significance of wonder in his clinical work, Hycner suggests, in the above quotation, that the capacity to feel amazement is an indicator of therapist well-being and functioning. Developing this theme further, my research findings have drawn attention to the pleasure and personal fulfilment experienced by being in wonder: the feelings of greater energy, ecstasy, love and happiness; a sense of flow and connection; enhanced clarity of meaning and conviction in the significance of their work. The third theme of my study focussed on how wonder brings an experience of renewal through deeper relational contact, fresh perspectives, direction, meaning and a clearer sense of purpose. This research suggests that an attunement to wonder might contribute to psychotherapists experiencing a positive psychological sense of flourishing within their professional lives. A recently developed and validated scale of general wellbeing (Longo et.al.. 2016) identified fourteen common constructs as indicators of individual well-being: happiness; vitality; calmness; optimism; involvement; awareness; acceptance; self-worth; competence; development, purpose; significance; congruence; connection. Considering these constructs in the context of my research findings reveals that being in wonder has the potential to bring many of positive feelings and positive functioning elements into experience even if only briefly. As well as its psychologically enhancing benefits, the experience of wonder may in fact be one of the variables which has a protective function against therapist burnout.

### **6.5.4 Implications for Wonder-Attuned Therapist Education**

There has been scant attention given to wonder in developmental psychology but a few studies indicate that individuals vary in their inclination towards wonder due to a range of factors such as personal disposition and the impact on sensitivity and imagination due to upbringing and education (Minney and Potter 1984; Opdal 2001). It is reasonable therefore to assume that therapists enter training with different levels of attunement to wonder. Whilst there is a small body of literature describing educational spaces and methods designed to help students and teachers connect and evoke wonder in the classroom (Egan, 2014; Hansen, 2015) there is no explicit, detailed commentary on wonder in the education of psychotherapists. Transposing some of the findings and discussion from this study about wonder between therapist and client to psychotherapy student and teacher offers an opportunity to begin a dialogue around how to develop a curriculum and pedagogy of existential psychotherapeutic education configured as a wondering event. Such an event would

facilitate therapists in developing their understanding of wonder as a phenomenon whilst also offering experiential opportunities to build their capacity to dwell in wonder.

- *Contributions to the Knowledge Base of Existential Therapy*

Existential psychotherapy explicitly draws on existential philosophy for its methods and underlying principles. One of the main contributions this study makes to the knowledge base of existential psychotherapeutic practice is bringing clinical attention to a philosophical topic hitherto neglected in the literature. This research widens the focus in existential therapy beyond the thoroughly theorized topic of anxiety in the face of death by considering the relational, transformative and restorative potential of attending to wonder as a response to the fact of our natality.

Verheoven (1972), whose phenomenology of wonder has been influential in guiding the thinking of many commentators referenced in this study, argues that: “The whole history of philosophy lies in a broad circle about the loose space of wonder, even when this wonder is regarded only as a starting point.” (p.11) Tracing the arc of wonder through philosophical thought generally from the Early Greeks through to contemporary existential thinkers could offer a way for non-philosopher therapists to begin to understand how wonder emerges as a fundamental principle of phenomenological philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger and influential phenomenological practitioners such as Rogers, van Deurzen and Yalom. In bringing more theoretical significance and critical attention to wonder, it would become a phenomenon to be deeply considered rather than be buried under assumptions that we know what it is to wonder or dwell in wondering. As my study has demonstrated, wonder is mysterious, complex, elusive and worthy of time spent reflecting on how it is experienced.

Other contributions findings from this study could make to extending the knowledge base of existential psychotherapy would be in offering potent examples in practice of complex theoretical concepts. This study, for example, has revealed wonder as a lived experience which has a profoundly embodied quality, is radically relational, offers a deep sense of meaning and purpose and promotes a sense of psychological well-being. The experience of wonder would thus offer a productive example to study the four dimensions of human existence (van Deurzen and Adams, 2011). In presenting rich descriptions of therapist wondering I suggest this study also offers existential therapists insight into the practical, therapeutic relevance of some of ideas from Arendt’s natal ontology and Heidegger’s later writings on meditative thinking. The study of wonder is rich in possibilities to consider the connections between existential theory/practice and mindfulness practices.

Stretching back to its roots in psychoanalysis, psychotherapeutic literature recognises how childhood attachments and experiences shape our ways of being in relationship with others and the world around us. This study suggests there may be potential value in also understanding childhood wonder as a source or expression of our ability to being open and forming passionate attachments. Bringing insight during training to the conditions and personal situations which support or close down wonder across the life-span may help therapists re-attune or re-ignite their childhood propensity to be in

wonder and so make it available as a resource in their therapeutic work. What makes childhood wonder a resilient characteristic of some individuals would be a worthy subject of study.

A final consideration on the contribution this research on wonder offers is in the context of the theme of spiritual belief in existential philosophy and psychotherapeutic practice. Whilst none of the participants in this study configured wonder in explicitly spiritual terms there were nevertheless many allusions to something beyond and a sense of something bigger than oneself. Existential philosophy encompasses a wide and diverse body of thinking. This diversity is particularly evident in the dimension of spiritual belief. Some of the influential philosophers existential psychotherapists draw on- and whose writings I drew upon during this study- such as Sartre and Camus were avowed atheists, whilst for others such as Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein; Heidegger, Levinas, Buber, Arendt, Irigaray and Marion, spirituality leaves a significant trace through their work. As the inspiration of the mystic, poet and scientist the study of wonder perhaps offers existential psychotherapists a space to reflect on a core human experience which can hold the most diverse philosophical bed-fellows.

- *Evoking Wonder in Education*

Two of the relational images emerging from my research: the wonder-filled therapist as “midwife” attending the birth of something new and the therapist and client emerging as a “community of wonderers” have been identified by some commentators as carrying potential for wonder based praxis in education. Hansen (2015) for example describes how the dialogical community of wonder and the teacher as Socratic midwife open up caring spaces of shared reflective enquiry in which unknowing is valued as a potential source of discovery and student assumptions are respectfully challenged to open up new perspectives. The phenomenological attitude of wonder is thus transmitted through the teaching method itself.

Whilst recognising that external regulation of educational programmes may be the drivers of prescriptive learning outcomes (Biggs and Tang, 2009), opportunities which resonate with the holistic, non-reductive qualities of wonder could be sought to promote imaginative and emotional connection within and across subjects. Acknowledging the spontaneous, discovery orientated aspects of wonder which emerged from the findings of this study it would be important to incorporate some recognition of creativity and unexpected learning outcomes into the assessment process.

### **6.5.6 Wonder-Filled Supervision**

Describing their vision for supervision education, Watkins and Wang have argued that:

Supervisor education (training/supervision) is an awe and wonder transmission process about an awe and wonder transmission process: just as psychotherapy/ counselling education is designed to transmit the awe and wonder of doing psychological treatment to



therapy/counsellor trainees, supervisor education is designed to transmit the awe and wonder of doing supervision to supervisor trainees. (2014, p.177)

Two participants in my study observed that their most concrete experiences of wonder in a clinical setting occurred during supervision. With greater space to engage in reflective wondering whilst being held in a trusting, collaborative, “love-filled” (Mia) supervisory relationship, both participants experienced moments of wonder which brought new insight, perspectives and knowledge about their client work. As a renewing and energising experience wonder may also play an important restorative function in supervision. The suggestions offered above for bringing a more wondering approach to psychotherapeutic education could also be an aspect of the supervisor education Watkins and Wong envision for facilitating a greater transmission of wonder.

### **6.5.7 Political and Ethical Implications of Wonder in Therapy**

The goals and practices of psychotherapy cannot be separated from the socio-historical-cultural context in which it occurs. Such contexts for example shape the power relations of the therapeutic relationship, validate and challenge the concept of expertise, inform competing agendas in professionalization and self-regulation, create measures of outcome and accountability.

Psychotherapy which is attuned to wonder has, I suggest, political implications in the way it disturbs categorical modes of thinking, promotes more ethical relationships, and suggests a hopeful alternative to the global uncertainty terror of our times.

- *Poetic Wondrousness and Technocratic Consciousness.*

One of the themes of wonder which emerged from this research has been how it is a phenomenon which in its expression in the therapist’s lived experience comes close to the poetic, contemplative thinking described by Heidegger. This way of being is a challenge to the non-wondrousness of technological thinking which in its impulse towards the instrumental and calculative shapes modern consciousness. Therapy which is open to wonder would have less concern with what can be measured and as Hycner suggests: “would deemphasize the need for control and security and recognize that the greatest certainty is that we do not genuinely know what will happen next in our lives” (1976, p.175). One of the implications of this study is in its demonstration of the therapeutic potential of the spontaneous, unique mystery and wondrous nature of deep relational contact. Even within a culture of managed care and manualized, protocol driven therapy which subject the therapeutic relationship to quantification, explication and efficiency measures there are still opportunities for moments of spontaneous wonder to erupt. As Jason, one of my participants exclaimed when recognising the value of a wonder-filled practice: “It’s not all about CBT!” This study was clear in identifying clinical potential inherent in wonder to act as a revitalising counterpoint to the alienating experience of routinized practice. Wonder fundamentally disturbs formulaic thinking. In wonder the individuality of the client is revealed in a transfigured encounter which compels the

therapist's intensified attention, dispels the familiar and mundane, disclosing the uniqueness of their client:

[W]eary clinical routine can provoke alienation as it tends towards the condition of other forms of production line... wonder redemptively opposes alienation, reengaging the clinician with what is otherwise merely familiar, merely routine. (Evans, 2012 p.6)

Wonder is radical in its power to not only awaken us from our everyday thinking but to evoke authentic existence, with both personal and wider political implications.

- *Ethical Practice.*

The ethical implications of therapy which is attuned to wonder has been a central theme of this research. Such wonder, which promotes an openness to difference and uniqueness philosophers have proposed is radical in its socio-political potential. Levinas, as I have described in an earlier chapter, understood *étonnement* as central to transforming human relationships in such a way that we respond to a fundamental calling towards the other as being prior to ourselves. Irigaray argues that wonder carries within itself the potential to disrupt the oppressive patriarchal consciousness which reduces and so denies traces of difference in the feminine other.

Participant therapists in this study described a radical openness and quality of mutual being-with as characterising their experience of wonder with their clients. Such moments displaced the power afforded to the therapist in terms of age, role, gender, class, education and brought them into vulnerable and mutual relationship where their client other was freed from the imposition of their therapist assumptions, agendas, power struggles. Whilst spontaneous and short-lived the possibilities of experiencing such deep, transparent and mutual relating was described as profoundly transformative. It is hoped that therapists might embrace a more consciously wondering and wonder attuned attitude in their practice as a way to support an ethical way of being with their clients.

- *Promoting Radical Hope.*

Dwelling in wonder the existential psychotherapist inhabits a therapeutic space with her clients which holds the potential of being ignited by the ordinary creative spark of life, bringing a range of unforeseen, new beginnings. Such wonder-attuned therapy holds the potential to disrupt a controlled, validated, protocol driven, evidenced-based therapeutic frame. Whilst offering the possibilities of tightly bounded, clinical efficacy, reliability and safety the price of wonder-less therapy maybe the loss of mystery, spontaneity, risk, uncertainty which also bring therapeutic promise ( Lodge, Totton) . As outlined in the early part of this study, there is growing interest in wonder as a human experience of particular relevance to our current time (Bulkeley, 2005; Fuller, 2006).

Tantum (2015, p.36) argues: "it may be timely for psychotherapists to listen more closely to the feminine voice in existential philosophy that has in the past been drowned out by a dominant

masculine voice.” My study suggests there is value for existential psychotherapy in revisiting the ethical writings of Irigaray on wonder and Arendt’s challenge to rethink life from the point of birth rather than death (1958). Earlier sections of this study have compared Arendt’s natal ontology with Heidegger’s ontology of mortality. Findings from my research indicate that a psychotherapist who dwells in wonder foregrounds, in those moments, natality as a given of existence. Arendt conceived of birth as a basis for politics in the wake of genocide and totalitarianism. Psychotherapeutic practice which takes into account her work seems especially pertinent today at a time when human existence is being shaped by terror and mourning.

As we live through global uncertainty in terms of war, displacement, the threat of terror, climate change, the instinct of humanity is understandably to seek certainty and stability (Lear, 2006). Paradoxically, at this time it is perhaps even more important to cultivate the capacity for individuals to be present with the unknown and to foster a sense of wonder in which we connect with something or someone beyond ourselves. I am reminded, here, of Frankl’s experience of wonder, where even amid the horror and degradation of the concentration camp there can be hope:

Standing outside we saw sinister clouds glowing in the west and the whole sky alive with clouds of ever-changing shapes and colours, from steel blue to blood red. The desolate grey mud huts provided a sharp contrast, while the puddles on the muddy ground reflected the glowing sky. Then, after minutes of moving silence, one prisoner said to another, “How beautiful the world could be!” (2006, p.60)

Whilst this study has focussed attention on wonder in the tightly focussed context of existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, I am reminded of the transformations evoked by astronauts who, having been touched by wonder, became: “led by these experiences to become more spiritually sensitive or more attuned ecologically or ethically after their return to Earth” (Gallagher *et al.*, 2015, p.2). Therapy, which is attuned to wonder, perhaps offers the space for therapist and client to bracket, for a moment, the fear of uncertainty and fully immerse themselves in the unknown becoming (re) connected with a space in which there is no fear only trust, love, a sense of connection, oneness and openness to possibility. The consequences of fostering a sense of wonder in therapy may transcend the therapeutic dyad opening individuals to experiences of connection and love more widely and much needed in this time of ecological and humanitarian global crisis.

## **6.6 Future Research**

Reflecting on the healing function of wonder in his therapeutic practice, Jason exclaimed that “It’s not all about CBT.” In a culture of Western therapy, which privileges evidence-based practice, the concept of an effective therapy, which is attuned to uncertainty, is a radical prospect. Although based on a small group of participants, my findings indicate that there may be therapeutic benefit when therapists attune to wonder. Having determined that it is possible to investigate such an ephemeral phenomenon, further research- qualitative and quantitative- could investigate whether wonder is a

phenomenon experienced beyond existential-phenomenological practice and whether different modalities bring different conceptualizations and meanings. One of the sub themes from this study was that wonder is an experience which may be shared with clients. Another suggested focus for enquiry therefore, might be a new study using a qualitative approach such as narrative research to describe client wonder and what meanings they make of these experiences. Further research might provide insight into whether the suggestion from this study – that wonder is mutually beneficial- is in fact the case. Does wonder open a client into experiencing a deeper connection with their therapist, offer new insights or therapeutic value?

A further focus for future research might centre on psychotherapy education. Are there any differences in the ability to practice phenomenologically among psychotherapy students who self identify as having retained a quality of wonder from childhood and those who don't?

Psychotherapeutic education demands high levels of mental, emotional and physical resilience. Given the rejuvenating qualities of wonder described in this study, research could determine whether already being attuned and /or being encouraged to cultivate wonder in their lives might offer a protective function against burn out and vicarious trauma during the process of training and ongoing professional practice.

## **6.7 Final Reflection**

Researching the phenomenon of wonder has been a profound experience of dwelling in the unknown. At times I have felt unsettled, ungrounded, confused and uncertain as to whether I had any grasp of the process or phenomenon. But the greater part of the experience has been filled with grace, serendipity and flow. To close this research narrative, I draw on an observation by Carl Rogers (1969, p.236) who declared that:

People are just as wonderful as sunsets if you let them be. When I look at a sunset, I don't find myself saying, "Soften the orange a bit on the right hand corner." I don't try to control a sunset. I watch with awe as it unfolds.

Opening to my participants as we wondered about their experiences, I was simultaneously opened by the wonder which emerged between us. This deepened sense of openness to life within and around me continues to resonate through my personal and professional life. My hope is that those who read this study might also be moved to let themselves be touched by wonder, and see what unfolds.

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# Appendices

Appendix 1: Categories of Wonder from Phenomenological Studies

Categories of wonder identified by Hycner ( 1976 pp 149-166)	Dimensions of wonder identified by Hove ( 1996 pp 74-166)	Categories of wonder identified by Gallagher et al. ( 2015 p 29)
1.Ground of normal experience 2.Unexpected 3.The Object of Wonder 4.Radical Otherness 5.Fascination 6.Being Taken 7.Powerful Impact 8.Openness 9.Overwhelming 10.Ineffable 11.Non-cognitive 12.Non-Attached Being 13.Paradoxes 14.Non-Task Orientation 15.Lived Space 16.Sense of Unity 17.Peacefulness 18.Interpersonal 19.Lived Time 20.Recall of wonder is	1. <i>Wonder-struck: Wonder brings us to a standstill.</i>  2. <i>'Oh...': Wonder leaves us speechless.</i>  3. <i>In a new light: Wonder opens our eyes.</i>  4. <i>'Look!': Wonder calls to us</i>  5. <i>The wonder of it all: Wonder gives things their meaning.</i>	1.Aesthetic appreciation 2.Drawn to phenomenon 3. Change ( internal or bodily) 4. Connectedness 5. Contentment 6. Disorientation 7. Dream-like experience 8. Elation 9. Emotional 10. Experience-hungry 11. Exteroceptive intensive experiences ( silence) 12. Floating ( weightlessness) 13. Floating in void ( not related to weightlessness) 14. Fulfillment 15. Home 16. Inspired 17. Intellectual appreciation 18. Interest/inquisitiveness 19. Interoceptive intense

wondrous.		<p>experiences.</p> <p>20. Joy</p> <p>21. Nostalgia</p> <p>22. Overwhelmed</p> <p>23. Perspectival ( spatial) change</p> <p>24. Perspectival shift ( internal change of moral values)</p> <p>25. Peace</p> <p>26. Pleasure</p> <p>27. Poetic Expression</p> <p>28. Responsibility ( towards others)</p> <p>29. Scale effects</p> <p>30. Sublime</p> <p>31. Surprise</p> <p>32. Totality</p> <p>33. Unity of external ( interrelatedness)</p> <p>34. Unity with whole ( feeling of oneness)</p>
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## Have you ever found yourself in Wonder with a client?



**IF SO, YOU ARE INVITED TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH PROJECT WHICH AIMS TO INVESTIGATE WHAT IT IS LIKE FOR EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICALLY ORIENTED THERAPISTS TO EXPERIENCE WONDER IN THEIR CLINICAL WORK.**

The experience of wonder is something we often associate with childhood, yet throughout our lives we are also moved to wonder in all sorts of ordinary and extraordinary situations. Wonder can overcome us in the presence of a loved one or a moment of silence in nature. We can be touched by wonder when listening to music or standing in front of a painting. Philosophers and theologians throughout history have theorized about wonder, recognizing its significance in human experience, yet there has been remarkably little empirical research into the emotion or mood of wonder in the fields of psychology or psychotherapy.

Within the context of existential psychotherapy, wonder has been described as a fundamental attitude of the practitioner when relating to clients, capturing a sense of openness and absence of judgment. There is however scant theoretical attention given to *how* wonder is actually experienced by therapists in relation to their clients. This study has been designed to develop a description of the phenomenon of wonder as experienced by existentially-orientated therapists in their clinical work.

### Information for Participants

You will have completed your clinical training and self-identify as an existential-phenomenological practitioner.

If you agree to take part in this study you will be invited to write a short (even just a few lines) describing an example of when you have been in an **attitude or mood of wonder, wondering or in the presence of the wonderful** whilst in a clinical setting with a client or clients.

You will then be invited to take part in a Skype interview of up to one hour at a time and date that is convenient to you in order to reflect on this experience of wonder and/or any others you may have had.

This study is a final part of a Doctoral Programme in Existential Psychotherapy undertaken at the *New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, London*. The research conducted by **Paula Seth** has full ethical approval from *Middlesex University* and is being supervised by Dr. Linda Finlay. If you are interested in participating please contact me at the email below and I can send fuller information about the study: **experienceofwonder@gmail.com**

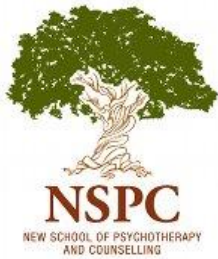
### Appendix 3: Participant Details

<b>Research Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Previously Known to me?</b>	<b>Professional Identity</b>	<b>Interview Format and Date</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential Psychotherapist</b></li> </ul>	<b>SKYPE</b> 7 <sup>th</sup> January 2015
<b>Andreas</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential Psychotherapist</b></li> <li>• <b>Psychologist</b></li> </ul>	<b>SKYPE</b> <i>5<sup>th</sup> February 2015</i>
<b>Mia</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential Psychotherapist</b></li> <li>• <b>Psychologist</b></li> </ul>	<b>SKYPE</b> <i>21<sup>st</sup> February 2015</i>
<b>Jason</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential Psychotherapist</b></li> <li>• <b>Psychologist</b></li> </ul>	<b>SKYPE</b> <i>17<sup>th</sup> March 2015</i>
<b>Ruben</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential Psychotherapist</b></li> <li>• <b>Medical Doctor</b></li> </ul>	<b>Face To Face</b> <i>13<sup>th</sup> May 2015</i>
<b>Tony</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>No</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential Psychotherapist</b></li> </ul>	<b>SKYPE-To-Phone</b> 21 <sup>st</sup> June 2015
<b>Dave</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>No</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential Psychotherapist</b></li> <li>• <b>Psychologist</b></li> </ul>	<b>SKYPE</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2015
<b>Nicholas</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>No</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Existential</b></li> </ul>	<b>SKYPE</b>



			<b>Psychotherapist</b> • <b>Psychologist</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2015
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Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet



**A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Existentially-Orientated Psychotherapist's Experience of Wonder in their Work with Clients.**

Research conducted by **Paula Seth** as a requirement for a **Professional Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling** from NSPC and Middlesex University

NSPC Ltd  
258 Belsize Road  
London NW6 4BT

Middlesex University  
The Burroughs  
London NW4 4BT

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Dated:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is

anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

### What is the purpose of the research?

This study is being carried out as part of my studies at NSPC Ltd and Middlesex University.

The experience of wonder is something we often associate with childhood, yet throughout our lives we are also moved to wonder in all sorts of ordinary and extraordinary situations. Wonder can overcome us in the presence of a loved one or a moment of silence in nature. We can be touched by wonder when listening to music or standing in front of a painting. Philosophers throughout history have theorized about wonder, recognising its significance in human experience yet there has been remarkably little empirical research into the emotion of wonder in the fields of psychology or psychotherapy.

Within the context of existential psychotherapy, wonder has been described as a fundamental attitude of the practitioner when relating to clients, capturing a sense of openness and absence of judgement. There is however scant theoretical attention given to *how* wonder is actually experienced by therapists in relation to their clients. This study has been designed to develop a description of the phenomenon of wonder as experienced by existentially-orientated psychotherapists in their clinical work. Emerging out of this study is the intention to describe the contexts or situations which typically influence or affect these experiences of wonder.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a qualified existentially-orientated psychotherapist and have experienced wonder in your work with clients.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

If you participate in this study you will be invited to take part in two activities:

#### **1. A Written Description of Wonder**

You will be invited to write, at a time convenient to yourself, a short description of an experience of wonder you have had in the context of working with a client. You will then send this description to me.

To help you write the description you may use the following instructions as a guide:

***Describe an experience you have had of wonder which occurred in a clinical setting. The experience can have occurred as you prepared for the client's arrival, whilst working with the client or immediately after the session.***

**Your experience of wonder may have occurred as a consequence of being in the presence of the wonderful or being the wonderer in an attitude of wondering.**

**In your description focus on a particular and concrete incident of wonder. Stay as close as possible to the experience of wonder/the wonderful/wondering as you lived through it. You may want to attend to the way space or time or other people were experienced and choose to recall the incident in the present tense- as if it is happening now. Try to focus on what was especially vivid for you about this experience. You can describe what led up to experience but there is no need for an introduction, rationalizations, interpretations and the account does not need to have " a beginning, middle and an end".**

**There is no specified length or time you need to spend on this description which can be as short as a few sentences or a few minutes.**

When I have received the written description by email or post I will use a qualitative research method to identify themes.

## **2. One Semi-Structured Interview**

The themes I identify from your description will form the basis of a semi-structured interview lasting about one hour. In this interview we will further explore the themes which emerged from your writing and there will be an opportunity to talk about any other experiences of wonder you may have had in a clinical context. **These interviews which will be either conducted by Skype and will take place at a time convenient to yourself or in person during May 2015 in central London in a psychotherapy clinic.**  
[1]

Once the interview is complete you will be offered an opportunity to debrief during which I will re-explain what will happen to the results of the study and offer you the opportunity to add anything you may feel is relevant. You will also be provided with contact details for my research supervisor.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the study or afterwards with no negative consequences.

For this study there will be 9-11 other participants.

*Special Considerations relating to the use of Skype:*

If you are not familiar with using Skype technology we can arrange to have a short "familiarisation" session before the scheduled interview. You are assured that I will conduct the interview in a location that is private and that no-one will interrupt us. I ask that you make arrangements to be interviewed at a time and in a location where you will not be disturbed.

What will you do with the information that I provide?

The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. This transcript will then be analysed together with transcripts from other participants using a qualitative research methodology (thematic analysis). If you wish, you can be emailed a copy of the transcript before it is analysed for you to read and edit any information you do not want to be included in the analysis.

Interviews will be digitally recorded and the files transferred to an encrypted USB stick for storage, deleting the files from the recorder. All of the information that you provide me will be identified only with a project code and stored either on the encrypted USB stick, or in a locked filing cabinet. I will keep the key that links your details with the project code in a locked filing cabinet. Excerpts from your data may be published verbatim in my final thesis but your name or identifying details will not be used.

Recordings will be deleted 6 months after I graduate. All other information you provide me will be kept for 5 years after I graduate and will be treated as confidential. Your consent form and anonymised transcript will be kept separately. If my research is published, I will make sure that your data is anonymised.

Data will be stored according to the UK the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000

As this study will ask you to describe experiences of wonder which have occurred in a clinical setting you may find yourself referring to clients. I remind you here of your responsibility to protect the confidentiality of your clients in your written descriptions and during interview. In the event that you do inadvertently share something that is confidential you will have the opportunity to ask during the interview that this data is removed or you can highlight this area to be deleted if you choose to review the transcript before it is analysed.

### Are there limits to confidentiality?

Although this is very unlikely, should you tell me something that I am required by law to pass on to a third person, I will have to do so. Under the UK Children's Act 2004, I am obliged to report any information which indicates that a child is at risk. Under the Terrorism Act 2000, if you give me information that associates you with terrorist activities, I will need to report this.

My academic supervisor may also request to see the data before it is anonymised. No other individuals will be able to do so before it is published.

### What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

It is very unlikely that writing or talking about the experience of wonder will evoke distress, however as wonder can be associated with states of openness and vulnerability I invite you to alert me to any distress or discomfort which may emerge at any stage in the interview process and we can bring the interview to a gentle close.

As this study focusses on experiences of wonder in a clinical context, reflecting on your practice might bring up questions or dilemmas for you and this may be uncomfortable. Although this possibility may be small, I invite you to let me know if you want to withdraw from participation at any stage.

### What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study although you may value the opportunity to reflect on an aspect of your professional experience and find value in the fact that your contributions may contribute to knowledge in the field of existential psychotherapy.

### Consent

You will be given a copy of this information sheet for your personal records, and if you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form before the study begins.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

### Who is organising and funding the research?

This research forms part of my doctoral degree in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University. It is self-funded.

### Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC research ethics sub-committee have approved this study

### Expenses

Unfortunately, no expenses or financial contribution will be paid for participation in this study.

### **Thank you for reading this information sheet.**

If you have any further questions, you can contact me at:

NSPC Ltd. 254-6 Belsize Road

London NW6 4BT

[experienceofwonder@gmail.com](mailto:experienceofwonder@gmail.com)

If you any concerns about the conduct of the study, you may contact my supervisor:

Dr Linda Finlay

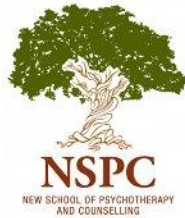
NSPC Ltd  
258 Belsize Road  
London NW6 4BT  
linda@lindafinlay.co.uk

Or

The Principal  
NSPC Ltd. 254-6 Belsize Road  
London NW6 4BT  
[Admin@nspc.org.uk](mailto:Admin@nspc.org.uk)  
0044 (0) 20 7624 0471

*Note: Highlighted section added for revised ethics submission to include a face-to-face interview.*

## Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form



### **A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Existentially-Orientated Psychotherapist's Experience of Wonder in their Work with Clients.**

Research conducted by **Paula Seth** as a requirement for a **Professional Doctorate in  
Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling** from NSPC and Middlesex University

NSPC Ltd  
258 Belsize Road  
London NW6 4BT

Middlesex University  
The Burroughs  
London NW4 4BT

Supervisor: Dr Linda Finlay

### **Written Informed Consent**

Dated:

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any

obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and provide my consent that this might occur.

\_\_\_\_\_

Print name

\_\_\_\_\_

Sign Name

date: \_\_\_\_\_

**To the participants:** All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC research ethics sub-committee have approved this study. Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Social Sciences Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 6: Debriefing Sheet

### Interview Debriefing Sheet



Researcher: Paula Seth  
New School Of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)  
258 Belsize Road  
London  
NW6 4BT  
Email: [experienceofwonder@gmail.com](mailto:experienceofwonder@gmail.com)

### **A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Existentially-Orientated Psychotherapist's Experience of Wonder in their Work with Clients.**

Supervisor: Dr Linda Finlay.

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research which forms part of my Professional Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling. The purpose of the study is to come to a description and deeper understanding of the existential therapist's experience of wonder in a clinical setting. The purpose of this interview was to come closer to understanding what it was like for you to experience wonder with your clients.

The next step for this study will be to transcribe and analyse the information you have shared with me today. Using your experiences and those of other participants I will try to understand and write a description of what it is like for existentially orientated therapists to experience wonder with clients. I will ensure your anonymity is preserved when my thesis or any other writings based on this research are published.

In order to keep your information safe I will now transfer the recordings of this interview onto an encrypted hard drive and will delete the files from the recorder. Recordings will be deleted 6 months



after I graduate. All other information you provide me will be kept for 5 years after I graduate and will be treated as confidential. Your consent form and anonymised transcript will be kept separately.

This study has been ethically approved by the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University Ethics Committee. If you are interested in reading more about this research or if you have concerns arising from the research or interview then please feel free to contact me or my research supervisor Dr Linda Finlay (linda@lindafinlay.co.uk). As I have mentioned in this sheet, you are free to withdraw from this study at any point in the process without having to give any explanation and without any negative consequences.

Whilst the risks associated with this study are low, the experience of wonder can result in feelings of openness and vulnerability which may have left you feeling uncomfortable. Reflecting on your professional work might have felt challenging. If this is your experience and you wish to discuss this with me further my contact details are above. You can also contact a professional psychotherapy organisation in your region such as the one listed below to find accredited practitioners. If this study has left you with an increased interest in wonder below are some references you may find useful.

Thank you again for taking the time to contribute to this study. It is very much appreciated.

With warm Regards,

Paula Seth

### **United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)**

The UKCP is a membership organisation for trained professionals. You can search their website to find psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors who are accredited practitioners with the UKCP.

Website: <http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk>

Email: [info@ukcp.org.uk](mailto:info@ukcp.org.uk)

Telephone: 0044 207 0149955

### **Select Bibliography on Wonder**

Bulkeley, K. (2005). *The Wondering Brain: Thinking about Religion with and beyond Cognitive Neuroscience*. Oxon: Routledge.

Fuller, R. (2006). *Wonder: from Emotion to Spirituality*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Holmes, R. (2008). *The Age of Wonder*. New York: Pantheon Books

## Appendix 7: Extracts from Research Journal - My Horizon of Wonder

Early journal entry relating to my exploring my personal understanding of wonder:

*October 2013*

*My life has been enriched by experiences of wonder: my first night alone with my newborn son; quiet moments in nature– a Himalayan forest, sunsets; a deer coming into a clearing of the woods where I live; standing in front of a Rothko painting falling into the colour. Even during the most mundane moments, out of the familiar texture of lived experience something can reveal itself as if for the first time. In these moments it is as if the world has called me and hearing it I am drawn into a new intimate relationship, pregnant with possibilities, meaning and significance. In this mood of wonder I stand still in astonishment at the emerging presence of something new and intensely powerful. In my professional life as a drama teacher I was fascinated by the power of theatre to evoke wonder in an audience, the disclosing of previously unknown dimensions of reality. I explored with students the way ritual in theatre could create moments of wonder which propelled us outside our normal range of experience. Theatre, poetry, movement became potent forms of language to communicate wonder to others. Now I sit here, feeling speechless and helpless as I search for language to describe the conceptual rupture which wonder opens up.*

*As a phenomenologically orientated psychotherapist who wonders, my intention is neither to abandon nor manipulate others for the sake of my own security. My aim is rather to resist objectification through sustaining the inexplicable and attend to what appears as such, uncovering and preserving the profoundly disturbing force of the mysterious, within the everyday.*

My Lived experience Description One

*January 21<sup>st</sup> 2014*

*I had dreamt of you the previous night, so when you call me for an urgent appointment after so many years I am not as surprised as perhaps I might have been. All you say on the phone is: "I need to see you". You arrive at the end of that day and you probably see my shock at how small you seem, I do not anticipate your fragility. I start to worry the room is too cold for you. You sit in the chair and saying nothing, a silence saturated with pain. We had travelled such a long journey together when*

*your husband was killed and now I don't know what we are doing together. What has happened? I want to say it but I can't talk- I can just look at you.*

*"I needed to see you." You repeat. "It has been like going through the rabbit hole- I didn't want to go down it but I have. That was my experience"*

*I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about- you are so familiar yet now so strange. I am fascinated by you and utterly still, aware now only of a growing tension in my chest as the never fully knowable reality of your life suddenly dawns on me. I feel helpless in front of you. "I needed to see you" you say again. So I just watch you and you watch me as we now sit in silence together. I have no idea of where we are going now.*

*"Through the rabbit hole" you repeat and I start to feel compressed, the air is close with the vibrations of your breathing...deep, noisy, your whole body is in the breath and I start to feel breathed by you. A sense of pressure around me – release and contract- in and out. I am breathing and transfixed. The space between us grows and reduces....you feel so distant and then so near...so tiny and then so huge. My eyes are wide open, "I need to see you. I am caught up in amazement – what are you doing? What are you becoming here and now? I feel disoriented and hang onto my chair in case I fall off. Your face wet with tears your skin radiant in the last rays of the sun. Beautiful. Your breathing is loud, rhythmical, almost panting. I feel such pressure I can't move or speak. I feel tiny and able only to sit still, watching you shine and listening to your body breath its pain. And all the time you watch me. Single point of focus. Timeless. Nothing else exists. I am utterly amazed that you have the courage to hold this. And I am humbled, opened by, present and available to you.*

*Reflection on this experience: In so much as I understand wonder as a radical openness, an awakening to what I encounter, then this event is for me one of wonder. Reflecting on the reference Ann makes to going down the rabbit hole I am instantly reminded of Irigaray's description of wonder as a bridge, or more exactly a point of passage between two worlds, the space-times of two differing others. Also Levinas's work in my being moved by her face – it is a wondrous sight.*

### My Lived experience Description Two

*3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014*

*The roll of emotions just kept turning- one moment he is flattened with loss and despair, describing having, for a moment, contemplated placing his shoes on the bridge with his phone tucked inside and jumping himself. Then he becomes consumed with rage and emptiness. He feels battered and destabilised by the intensity of such new, raw grief. I am thrown into a state of alert assessing risks and formulating a safety plan. Once again I am with another human being facing the existential*

*question head-on: Why life? Why choose life? Why didn't my friend choose life? Why? We are in a space of wondering where all answers seem impossible and insufficient.*

*And then out of nowhere, it seems, he starts to describe walking across the college courtyard the day after his friend's death. He is describing the silence, the stillness and how:*

*"I just stood still and looked around. Everything was so familiar and yet I don't recognise it. It wasn't not shock...it was like...it was like beautiful and new."*

*His voice carries the impression of wonder and I am in that space together with him: the silence and stillness and the sense that something new is happening. The fearful contraction of earlier has gone and there is a sense of expansion in the room. We are no longer talking about the meaning of his life but simply present to the fact of his own being-there. I feel stunned that something so beautiful and life-filled has emerged from the pain of a few moments earlier. And I have no language to describe the moment.*

*"I'm not a religious person," he eventually says, "but.... it feels.... spiritual".*

*Reflection on this experience: Brian's description of wonder as he walked across the college grounds emerged from a place of our wondering together about questions which drew deeply on the depths of his encounter with the meaning of living. I am reminded that one of the etymological roots of wonder is wound- wonder is also a site of opening, Brian was wounded, but in this moment of wonder he was opened to feeling the flow of life rather than the limit of death. In the moment of stillness and silence we shared he described how wonder momentarily opened up a new horizon for him, there was also for me a sense of something sacred.*

## Appendix 8: Extracts from Research Journal - Examples of Heuristic Reduction

1. *"I notice how I am becoming much more aware of my own breathing...how it has slowed down. I am here in the room in a much more present way...much more accepting of how this conversation is going...more open to what is happening rather than "chasing" after the phenomenon. I have no real idea how this relates to wonder but I am just letting it be. Letting myself be more in the dialogue. Feels a bit risky in the context of my research but I paradoxically feel more relaxed."*(Written during and directly after interview with John.)
2. *"But maybe this is what wonder is for him...reflective without answers ...wondering what to wonder? I suspect I am in the presence of his wondering."*(Written directly after interview with Andreas.)
3. *"This feels like I am really on a journey of discovery- in the moment with Mia wondering together and then discovering some deeper experience/new understandings."*(Written directly after interview with Mia.)
4. *"The feeling of connection and relationship and wonder are so intertwined here I am getting a bit lost but just staying with it...it feels intermingled...wonder and connection."*(Written during and directly after interview with Jason.)
5. *"I feel as if I am being let into something immense already- I feel breathless and anxious with where this will go- can I stay with it...even if I will be capable of following? And yet... (said at the same time...attunement) Wonder and anxiety! I can feel him stall- hesitate about where this is going...does he want to reveal what is emerging. I feel a sense of excitement...something building.... What is the cough about?"*(Written during and directly after interview with Ruben.)
6. *"I have no idea where the word beauty came from here- I just felt a sense of grace and beauty. That he picks this word up and uses it- what does this mean for the interview- a sense of dialogue- that we are creating?"*(Written directly after interview with Tony.)
7. *"Over the last few minutes I have been experiencing a growing sense of connectedness with this participant- a sense of understanding what is being said and what might be out of awareness- It is both intense and relaxed... I have a sense of just being with what is happening, opening to the process, trusting this is wonder emerging and able to let go if it's not. It's a pleasurable experience of sharing- sense of reconnecting with my own*

*experience of wonder- but not sure what that means- resonance. There is a trance like quality- feel transfixed and the present moment is all there is. I have no sense of how much time is really passing. I am moved to spontaneously share the experience I am having.*"(Written during and directly after interview with Dave.)

8. *"Well this blows out thoughts of wonder and face of the other!!! I notice my attachment to this idea and the excitement at letting it go!* (Written during and directly after interview with Nicholas.)

## Appendix 9: Example of Editing a Lived experience Description

### John's Full Written Lived Experience Description:

I once saw a 44 year old female client who had lost her mother when she was only 4. Her mother went to the hospital to give birth to her second child and never returned - dying in childbirth. All the remaining family smothered the 4 year old child with love and care to 'protect her'. Eventually she was distracted to the point of forgetting her mum and focussing on her subsequent new mum, when dad remarried. After 18 months of working with this client I was very curious as to what this experience might have been like for the four year old client and what it meant to her today. I wondered about how the well-meaning distraction techniques served to make the adults more comfortable at the expense of a child who was denied the opportunity to grieve - only to grieve perhaps in a different form for the next fort years. This was exacerbated by a general denial of her mother's very existence and an unspoken rule that no one was to ever ask about her. As someone who lost a father at the age of 11, I was well aware of the impact of an adult's interpretation of my thoughts and feelings and a sense of being overlooked as too young to be told, yet paradoxically too young to require support either. At least I knew that my dad had died and his memory was never erased for me by others. In my client's case, I wanted to know how she made sense of her predicament, what it felt like for her and whether there was a way of re-living the loss such that she could become better informed and connect fully with her grief and the new world that it opened up to her. We eventually explored a guided visualisation where once in a very relaxed state, I invited the client on a journey. In the visualisation, she entered a hospital as her 54 year old self and walked to the maternity wing and eventually down a long corridor. At the other side of the corridor she saw the figure of a woman walking towards her - it turned out to be her mother at the age she always pictured her as. Out of respect for what happened next, I will not explain the next 30 minutes of the session but will talk about what happened for me. I also pictured what was going on, using a mixture of the client's words and my own imagination. I saw myself looking at this lady, I noticed how I felt. There was a pressure in my chest that was building. A similar pressure was developing behind my eyes. I felt sad and equally didn't want to cry. I noticed this and wondered if the client felt the same, so asked her trying not to interrupt the process too. Paying attention to what I was feeling and moving my attention to and fro between this, the client in front of me and the image that we had co-created, I attempted to enter her world and experience whatever she was experiencing in a way that might enable me to tentatively explore this encounter better. I would also step outside of this imagery and back to myself in the therapy room attempting to ground myself at the same time whilst helping facilitate the client's experience, knowing that in order to do this I also had to live the client's experience to some degree. This circular movement between stepping into the experience, sensing self, checking with client, stepping back from the experience and checking again forms a way of being that I associate with wonder and curiosity in the therapeutic space. It is a way in which I could both experience and make sense of, in a way which could be reflected back to the client so that they might also explore their own making-sense-of in a different way too, whilst feeling deeply attuned

with or validated by another. In the case of this client, she was able to be with her mother before eventually saying goodbye, in her own time and in a way which felt right for her. I knew it felt right because of how she described her experience subsequently and because of the sense of lightness and sadness that I experienced in the moment too. My curiosity subsided into a more relaxed and satisfied state. I felt tired and content. "

***Extract from Research Journal: What choices did I make in editing John's original text?***

How do I edit this text to intensify the description and "remain constantly orientated" to the phenomenon of wonder? It's already in the first person but the first section feels like contextualization so though it's a lot of material I feel the actual experience of wonder doesn't actually start till mid-way through. "I see myself looking" pulls me into his experience. I don't think I need to change words but will change to the present tense to enhance a sense of immediacy. (2/1/2015)

**Edited Lived Experience Description**

I see myself looking at this lady, I notice how I feel. There is a pressure in my chest that is building. A similar pressure is developing behind my eyes. I feel sad and equally didn't want to cry. I notice this and wonder if the client feels the same, so I ask her trying not to interrupt the process too. Paying attention to what I feel and moving my attention to and from between this, the client in front of me and the image that we have co-created, I attempt to enter her world and experience whatever she is experiencing in a way that might enable me to tentatively explore this encounter better. I step outside of this imagery and back to myself in the therapy room attempting to ground myself at the same time whilst helping facilitate the client's experience, knowing that in order to do this I also have to live the client's experience to some degree. This circular movement between stepping into the experience, sensing self, checking with client, stepping back from the experience and checking again forms a way of being that I associate with wonder and curiosity in the therapeutic space. It is a way in which I both experience and make sense of, in a way which can be reflected back to the client so that they might also explore their own making-sense-of in a different way too, whilst feeling deeply attuned with or validated by another. In the case of this client, she is able to be with her mother before eventually saying goodbye, in her own time and in a way which feels right for her. I know it feels right because of how she describes her experience and because of the sense of lightness and sadness that I experience in the moment too. My curiosity subsides into a more relaxed and satisfied state. I feel tired and content.



## Appendix 10: Full Transcript Example - John

*There was a short period of preamble before the focus of the research started and transcribed here—making sure skype was working, making sure the participant was relaxed and ready to be interviewed, turning on the recorder.*

... Indicates pause of a few seconds

... [Pause]... Indicates pause of longer than 5 seconds

// Indicates overlapping speech

**In bold** comments in reflexive column were written down during the interview and a time noted to facilitate linking back to the transcript. Other comments were written down during reflection whilst listening to the audio recording, during the transcription process, reading the transcript.

<b>Reflexive Comments</b>	<b>Transcript</b>	<b>Thematic Analysis Stage 1: Units of meaning which relate to the lived experience of wonder.</b>
<p><i>I have leapt straight into the central theme of his LED. "Attunement" -how will this focused opening shape the subsequent interview?</i></p> <p><i>Feel I should draw myself in here. Stay closer to John's words: be more phenomenological.</i></p> <p><i>"To start off".... I wonder where his wonder is going to go?</i></p>	<p>R1: John, if I've got it right, you had a strong sense of wonder as attunement ... and a relational flow between being in your own grounding in yourself and opening up to the other.</p> <p>J1: Yes it was a mixture...it was a mixture of ...interesting you say that...I think it was a very active (1)</p> <p>R2: Active</p> <p>J2: Active</p> <p>R3: Yes</p> <p>J3: Wonder to start off ...It was kind of like putting myself into the space of wonder(2) ... erm... or somehow facilitating that</p> <p>R4: Mmm</p> <p>J4: But then actually being taken over (3) by that process of attunement (4) and by kind of creating that space (5)and that...you know...vulnerability (6) erm then noticing you know, paying attention to what I am feeling (7) and working with the client in a way where there is a movement between what I am experiencing and feeling and noticing that and stepping back from that and also checking with the client (8) and asking what he is feeling and asking him to describe what is</p>	<p><b>1) It was very_active</b></p> <p><b>2) Putting himself in the space of wonder.</b></p> <p><b>3) Being taken over.</b></p> <p><b>4) A process of attunement.</b></p> <p><b>5) Creating that space</b></p> <p><b>6) A sense of vulnerability</b></p> <p><b>7) Paying attention to what he is feeling.</b></p> <p><b>8) There is a movement between himself and other: what is being felt and experienced, noticing that, stepping back and checking with the client.</b></p>

<p><i>Stay close-keeping this as concrete as possible.</i></p> <p><i>I can feel myself being pulled in- a powerful sense of my own deep interest here, right now.</i></p> <p><i>“Sharing what I never knew”- this feels so much about this interview too. A sense of immediacy.</i></p> <p><i>I’ve missed “novel”- it’s so much more evocative than my “different.” Where might that have taken up?</i></p> <p><b><i>I have a strong sense of the shared space of this interview</i></b></p>	<p>going on...It is a very much a movement.(9)</p> <p>R5: It was that circular movement.... back and forth that was very strongly expressed as an experience ...I am wondering what is that sort of movement like? What is that sense of space between ...the travelling between movement stepping... you described it as stepping into the experience... what is that sense.</p> <p>J5: It’s a sense of wonder, of curiosity (10) it’s a, it’s a erm.....it’s a deep interest (11)</p> <p>R6: Deep interest</p> <p>J6: A deep interest, a passion (12) for wanting to grasp that...</p> <p>R7: Mmm</p> <p>J7: A wanting to grasp what it is (13) because I have a conviction, a conviction that what I am feeling - erm a tuning (14). And at the same time experience has demonstrated to me that it is often a shared experience (15) and because it’s a shared experience it’s now a way of hearing and listening to the other (16) and sharing with the other what I never knew (17) - it was never part of my awareness, never part of my culture, my upbringing my logical way of thinking.</p> <p>R8: So something different//</p> <p>J8: // So something novel...(18)</p> <p>R9: So something different opens up.</p> <p>J9: Yeah...and a way of communicating or hearing somebody else through my embodied awareness (19) and in a way that the other person sometimes doesn't know that is what they are feeling until I point it out to them, until I suggest what is going on. (20) You know: “What are you feeling? What are you noticing?” And they attune to that shared space as well, they attune to that in that moment too. (21)</p> <p>R10: So curiosity or wonder opens you into that shared space or is wonder is that shared space?</p> <p>J10: Yes...good question... a bit of both.</p>	<p><b>9) It is a very much a movement</b></p> <p><b>10) Wonder as curiosity</b></p> <p><b>11) A deep interest.</b></p> <p><b>12) Deep interest- a passion</b></p> <p><b>13) A wanting to grasp what it is.</b></p> <p><b>14) A tuning</b></p> <p><b>15) A shared experience</b></p> <p><b>16) A way of hearing and listening to the other</b></p> <p><b>17) Sharing with the other what he never knew.</b></p> <p><b>18) Something novel.</b></p> <p><b>19) A way of communicating or hearing somebody else through his embodied awareness.</b></p> <p><b>20) Pointing out something they didn’t know they were feeling.</b></p> <p><b>21) Attuning to the shared space in the moment.</b></p>
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<p><b><i>This feels so active- like we are creating that space here, between us.</i></b></p> <p><i>Keep things concrete- don't lose myself in the interview. Holding both spaces for myself is quite hard.</i></p> <p><i>I am starting here to get a sense of wonder as making sense of something.</i></p> <p><b>Passion and wonder?</b></p> <p><b>I am feeling lost- is this about wonder still?</b></p> <p><i>I think I got lost there...Have I got this right? Need to</i></p>	<p>R11: A bit of both?</p> <p>J11: There is an attitude of wonder (22) and first of all is adopting the attitude which is in that place where I am listening out for (23). And then ...as I attune to that space it more of a kind of being in wonder (23)...in that moment. So there is an.....erm....a kind of a creating of the space in the first place or allowing that space or listening out for that space (24) which is an active process...(25)</p> <p>R12: An active process...</p> <p>J12: ...and then stepping into it (26) there seems to be these two parts to it. (27)</p> <p>R13: And is there a difference, a qualitative difference between that conscious stepping into an attitude of wonder which seems quite, when you describe a listening, like an openness//</p> <p>J13: //yeah</p> <p>R14: An attentiveness and a being in wonder?</p> <p>J14: I think there isn't a..... erm.... it's quite difficult for me to articulate (28) but I think there is a very much more of a ...there is a ...cognitive element to the initial phase that comes from desire...(29)</p> <p>R15: Desire....</p> <p>J15: [Pause] Will and wanting to do this (30) and ...erm it, it and then there is an attunement, where there is more of a stillness of my thoughts (31) in order to hear what is going on for me in an embodied kind of way, to attune to what I am feeling and to notice that. But as soon as I do that I go back into my thoughts again. It's a cyclical thing (32)...its iterative....where I am consciously electing to put myself into a certain stance and losing myself in the wonder whilst I hear and feel what is going on. And then there is a shift out of that. (33) For as soon as I grasp something, feel something, there is a wanting to check with the other person or with myself. So... so soon as I get that I want to say: "Is this me? Is this something I am familiar with... I er you know, used to or is this different? Is there a reason for this I am aware of? Or is this something that I am new to, and in the moment, and perhaps shares some</p>	<p><b>22) First there is the adopting an attitude of wonder.</b></p> <p><b>23) And then there is being in wonder.</b></p> <p><b>24) There is a creating of the space in the first place or allowing that space or listening out for that space.</b></p> <p><b>25) It is an active process.</b></p> <p><b>26) Then stepping into it.</b></p> <p><b>27) There seems to be two parts to it.</b></p> <p><b>28) Its quite difficult for him to articulate.</b></p> <p><b>(29) There is a ...cognitive element to the initial phase that comes from desire.</b></p> <p><b>30) Will and wanting to do this.</b></p> <p><b>31) Then there is an attunement where there is more of a stillness of his thoughts.</b></p> <p><b>32) Hearing what is going on in an embodied way- attuning and noticing feelings then returning to thoughts again. A cyclical thing.</b></p> <p><b>33) Consciously electing to put himself into a certain stance and losing himself in the wonder whilst hearing and feeling what is going on. And then there is a shift out</b></p>
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<p>check.</p> <p><i>I am struggling a bit to stay with the cognitive. I have such a strong sense of John's attunement with his clients and I don't quite know yet what this has to do with wonder. I am not sure I am making proper sense yet. Be more concrete.</i></p> <p><i>Can feel I have become sidetracked here- looking for something rather than letting it emerge. Feels forced.</i></p> <p><i>I breathe deeply- Relief? Gratitude? Resonance?</i></p>	<p>commonality with the other? (34) ...It's a movement between these two ways.(35)</p> <p>R16: So there is an openness, an opening to what is and then there is a moment where there is some knowledge, some cognition, some awareness some meaning emerging and in that moment you are checking with yourself , is this mine or is this something new? And then re-entering into, offering that for clarification. Yeah.</p> <p>J16: Yeah, it's almost like a movement between my thoughts and my body. And in my body I am feeling and within a moment of feeling something I then become conscious of feeling it and in that consciousness I am languaging it and when I start to language it I obviously move into that cognitive space again. (37)</p> <p>R17: So when you are in that physical, embodied sense- is that experience, that felt sense of wonder- is there a quality of that, because in your writing you talk about a lightness a sense of lightness, and I wonder there are any other or if there other ways of describing the felt -sense of being in wonder? I know it's hard with language as you say...but...</p> <p>J17: Yes, I am not sure, but I think the lightness was a specific to that client.</p> <p>R18: mmm... It was?</p> <p>J18: As opposed to something I generally feel.</p> <p>R19: So it was a specific to that client rather than a general description of wonder that you would experience.</p> <p>J19: Yes.</p> <p>R20: So is there anything about the felt-sense of that state that you have experienced?</p> <p>J20: You mean specific to that client?</p> <p>R21: No, when you have just described that place where you move from that pre-cognition to the languaging of it...is there a felt sense in that pre-cognitive space? Is there a felt-sense of that that you</p>	<p>of that.</p> <p><b>34) As soon as something is grasped or felt there is a wanting to check with the other person or self if this is his and familiar, or new. Is this newness of the moment?</b></p> <p><b>35) Its a movement between these two ways.</b></p> <p><b>36) It's almost like a movement between thoughts and body.</b></p> <p><b>37) In the body there is feeling and in the moment of feeling there comes consciousness and then a languaging of consciousness which is in a cognitive space.</b></p> <p><b>38) There is something that happens with breathing.</b></p>
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<p><i>I forgot for a moment we weren't in the same room.</i></p> <p><b>Breath! This has surprised me!</b></p> <p><i>What is this about? I can feel the massive significance of this as it has emerged in the interview but have no idea what breath has to do with wonder.Mindfulness?</i></p>	<p>could connect with?</p> <p>J21: Mmm...I am thinking about it and imagining that I am placing myself in there. [ pause] There is something that happens with my breathing. (38)</p> <p>R22: Mmmmmm</p> <p>J22: A thing like breathing into that...breathing...I...as I pay attention to my body and it is usually around my upper body, my chest, my stomach (39) ...but it's usually.... in that sort of area... you probably can't see it...</p> <p>R23: I can.</p> <p>J23: But I am rubbing my torso as I am doing so ,up and down...something about that space, that solar plexus...above and below...(40) As I am attuning to it I am more breathing into it, breathing into it helps me facilitate the experiencing of any changes or any sensations in parts of my body. (41) So yeah...there is, that's the main thing I recognise doing.</p> <p>R24: The breath.</p> <p>J24: Yes</p> <p>R25: So in this are you describing the breath in terms of inhalation and exhalation, of expansion and contraction...or is it a process of grounding yourself with your breath or being attentive to your breath in the moment?</p> <p>J25: I think it is more being attentive to it...but the flow of breathing in, the movement of breathing in it's almost like... [pause]...like a cursor, (42) you know on your laptop. It's kind of like the flow of movement of my breath positions my awareness, my felt-sense through my body... It's a movement, like a scan up and down (43) and it relates to ...let me see...the movement of my breath ...something like that...there is a movement to it...it feels sort of fluid, (44) my breath takes my awareness with it, you know.</p> <p>R26: So your breath is carrying you ...it's...</p> <p>J26: Yeah</p>	<p><b>39) Paying attention to the upper body, chest, and stomach.</b></p> <p><b>40) Something about that space, that solar plexus...above and below.</b></p> <p><b>41) Breathing into it helps facilitate the experience of any changes or sensations in the body.</b></p> <p><b>42) The flow of breathing in, the movement of breathing in it's almost like a cursor on a laptop.</b></p> <p><b>43) The flow of movement of the breath positions awareness, the felt sense through the body. It's a movement, like a scan up and down.</b></p> <p><b>44) There is a movement to it, it feels fluid.</b></p> <p><b>45) The center of awareness</b></p>
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<p><b>Really aware of my own breathing now.</b></p> <p><i>I feel in danger of being lost too... just summarize what I think has just happened... feels very here and now.</i></p> <p><b>Revealing:</b> significant word?</p> <p><b>Whoa!</b> This took me by surprise. Wasn't expecting the tables to turn and be asked about MY experience. Momentarily flustered...what should I do? What am I feeling? Have no idea so decide to be congruent and answer him. I have</p>	<p>R27: It's...</p> <p>J27: Yes, it's like the center of my awareness is with my breath. (45)</p> <p>R28: In your breath.</p> <p>J28: I'm kind of speaking out loud so I don't know if it makes sense.( 46)</p> <p>R29: Yes, it is...</p> <p>J29: Whether this is generally true or not this is what is coming up to me...it's as though it's a breathing in and an exhalation [Participant audibly and visibly exhales]. I am trying to work out if there is anything different or relevant in the breathing in and the breathing out. There is something to do with both parts that seem to have a function of my attending to what is going on...my experience of any sensation in parts of the body... and it's the full movement of the breathing in and the breathing out that either initiates that awareness or is part of that felt-sense generally. (47) It is part of that tuning with what I am feeling. [John really slowing down here as he connects with his experience]. I guess the more I think about it the more I get lost in my thoughts rather than being in that space. (48)</p> <p>R30: So being present in the flow of that breath creates that sense of openness, the attunement that is a characteristic before the thoughts, and the cognitions, and the sense of ...then you can almost feel what might be //</p> <p>J30: //Yeah</p> <p>R31: //going on and then you check in with the client " Ok, this has emerged, this// ...</p> <p>J31: //Yeah</p> <p>R32: //has come out of the space."</p> <p>J32: Yeah so the breathing is very much part and parcel of the process of beginning to attend to and then revealing the sensations that are present that I may not be aware of at the start of. (49)</p> <p>R33: So there is revealing...that is the beginning of</p>	<p><b>is with the breath.</b></p> <p><b>46) He doesn't know if this makes sense.</b></p> <p><b>47) Its the full movement of the breathing in and the breathing out that either initiates that awareness or is part of that felt-sense generally.</b></p> <p><b>48) Thinking means being lost in thoughts rather than being in the space.</b></p> <p><b>49) Breathing is very much part and parcel of the process of beginning to attend to and then revealing sensations that were present at the start but behind awareness.</b></p>
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<p>been more in the felt sense all interview so feels more appropriate to surrender to this even though in the moment I am worried about researcher ethics and what I might reveal. Didn't plan for this eventuality.... And then we are back to John's experience and me in "researcher" role. But now I don't know what that is- who is the researcher... co-creation!</p>	<p>the process of revealing to you some knowledge, something that has emerged for you?</p> <p>J33: Yeah...that feels right... [Pause]... Are you feeling anything now?</p> <p>R34: I feel empty actually...it feels spacious and you feel very, very close, it's as if the distance//</p> <p>J34: //I don't know if I am talking about it and I have emphasised it...but I am feeling something in the top part of my chest as I am talking... and I sense it is me because I am picturing myself in the therapeutic space with a client. I am assuming this is me...but I don't know in this moment but its only by checking in with another that I know really if this is all about me or if this is something reflecting maybe your experience of what is going on. And equally what I don't know necessarily if what is happening for you is actually a reflection of what is going on for me - so I start to co-create something (50)</p>	<p><b>50) Co-creating something</b></p>
<p>This is what I had been worried about- can anyone describe wonder?</p> <p><b>Being used?</b> How fascinating- John used me to connect with his experience.</p>	<p>R35: that co-creation ...there is a lack of definition between what is mine and yours or self and other? A co-created quality came out in your writing and in your describing there just really evoked that.</p> <p>J35: Yes, yes, yes, quite.</p> <p>R36: So when there is that co-created space... to reflect back ...you asked me what my experience was? I felt the distance between us became very small there wasn't as much space and it was actually very comfortable it was almost - I can't quite put it into words - but the distance between us was charged, there was a connection... erm... emerged as you talked about the breath.</p>	<p><b>51) When in wonder, the more attempt is made to articulate it there is a movement away from that space.</b></p>
<p>Did I create the experience or did we ?</p> <p><b>Intense</b> A very charged atmosphere between us- of</p>	<p>J36: What I am becoming aware of is that the more I start to describe it to myself the more I withdraw from that normal experience I have. When I am in wonder...the more I attempt to articulate it the more I actually move away from that space (51) and maybe my asking you was a way of re-connecting again and getting into that position of attending to in the presence of another and opening up to that space of wonder. (52) Maybe that was what I needed to do to close that space and connect again with that feeling.</p>	<p><b>52) Reconnecting by attending to the presence of another opens up a space of wonder.</b></p> <p><b>53) Generating that feeling.</b></p>

<p>closeness despite Skype. A powerful sense of CONNECTION is occurring.</p> <p>I feel myself relaxing a little. The atmospheric pressure has dropped and we feel more in a state of enquiry rather than mutual experience.</p> <p><b>I feel curious...</b>feels different to how I was before- in that intense state of open wonder where I had no idea what was happening other than I was in a strong connection with John.</p> <p><b>Exactly.</b> This is exactly my (our?) experience in this interview too!</p>	<p>R37: To connect again with that feeling.</p> <p>J37: To generate it somehow. (53)</p> <p>R38: So what does it feel like now?</p> <p>J38: So what it feels like is very much like there is a connection (54) and there is - like you said- a closeness, a closing of the distance. (55)</p> <p>R39:Mmmm</p> <p>J39: Yes.</p> <p>....[Pause]....</p> <p>R40: ...That feels very powerful.</p> <p>J40: Usually with my clients I get a lot of business people, a lot of men and this is a very alien kind of way of working with them looking for certain answers and advice. (56) And what I am doing is very different so there is a little bit of hesitancy (57) on my part and testing...</p> <p>R41: Ok...</p> <p>J41: ....And there is also curiosity which is about their reaction to this whole process. With some people it really... with some people it's a moment of realisation or opening as well.... because the knowledge, they are not expecting it necessarily, and because it is opening up the different worlds for them, different spaces, different ways of relating to themselves and others and they are not accustomed to. (58) So there is an additional curiosity often going on about that whole process and what is happening for them in this moment when we do this very different thing and whether this is going to be helpful and meaningful to them and whether this is, you know scary for them, that they might reject.</p> <p>R42: This use of curiosity feels slightly different - there was something when you talked about wonder and I am just trying to understand the difference ...it's like you used them in almost different places for two different things...there was curiosity as to how they would understand the process, how they would relate to it and if they could move with that.. move into that</p>	<p><b>54) A feeling of connection.</b></p> <p><b>55) A closeness, a closing of the distance.</b></p> <p><b>56) This is alien to a way of working which is about answers and advice.</b></p> <p><b>57) There is a little bit of hesitancy</b></p> <p><b>58) Curiosity about the other's reaction to being opened up to different worlds, different spaces, different ways of relating to selves and others.</b></p> <p><b>59) Curiosity closes the gap and returns us to the room and what is being felt.</b></p> <p><b>60) One way of curiosity is to change the space and the</b></p>
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<p><b>Vulnerability.</b> That is what I felt earlier in that moment of wonderful connection- vulnerable.</p>	<p>space//</p> <p>J42: //Yeah</p> <p>R43// and there was that description of wonder which is the place you were inviting them into and evoking and so...</p> <p>J43: Yeah. I think there are different aspects of that as there are times when I feel I am working with a client and we are getting too heady and we feel like we are not in the space, are not together. He or she is talking about something that isn't here and erm sometimes, in order to close the gap and to bring the client and myself back into the room, I have this curiosity "what is going on between us and what is being felt?" (59)And so sometimes I begin with that as a way of changing the space and erm changing the way we relate to each other. (60)One way of being curious is to do with that and then there is another which is like in the write up I sent you which is where there is something very special going on for the client- like a sharing and I can share with and that has more of a sense of wonder about it. (61) When we are talking about something really significant, really important here and I deeply want to know what it is like for that person right now. (62)</p> <p>R44: Yes. You deeply want to know.</p> <p>J44: One is an approach erm and one is, is about what is going on. (63) The other is also about shifting and maybe shifting, shifting the space we are in from one of chatter and noise to actual connection: being with.</p> <p>R45: Wonder- is that what somehow facilitates that shift?</p> <p>J45: Yes it does, it facilitates it by re- directing the space into perhaps what I often imagine is being avoided...that's our vulnerability, our feelings , a felt-sense that you know which underpins a client in the room in the first place. So that's kind of being avoided. (64) Or the discomfort of not knowing what to say or how to describe it is replaced by chatter. The chatter serves a person and my curiosity is: are they even aware of anything underneath that and what is underneath that and what is it like for them? And if I was to ask them to attend to that feeling rather than to</p>	<p>way of relating.</p> <p><b>61) Another sway of being curious has more of a sense of wonder about it.</b></p> <p><b>62) There is a sense of significance, importance of deeply wanting to know what it is like for that person right now.</b></p> <p><b>63) One is an approach – shifting the space from chatter and noise to actual connection: being with. One is about what is going on.</b></p> <p><b>64) Wonder redirects the space into what is being avoided: vulnerability, feelings, a felt-sense that underpins the client in the room.</b></p> <p><b>65) My curiosity is to get underneath the chatter and ask what it is like for them in a way that is not threatening.</b></p>
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<p>Feeling lost is definitely how I have been at times in this interview!</p>	<p>talk about it maybe they can actually connect with what is going on for them in a way which doesn't, which isn't threatening. (65) Because it's not asking them to articulate stuff that they have no vocabulary for but it's asking them to attend to physical sensations and their immediate experience in a phenomenological manner and using these... erm... Gendlin's focusing techniques to help them relate to that which might otherwise be confusing or threatening or they might not even have the vocabulary or familiarity with, such that the process, the sense of it and the inability to talk about it leads them off into different directions.</p> <p>R46: I am getting a powerful sense of when someone isn't able to name or know on the horizon, what is there in their lives they are avoiding or can't see or name but there is a sense for you there is something there.</p> <p>J46: Yes.</p> <p>R47: But by moving into wonder which is interestingly something that is hard to name, pre-cognitive as you described it, then inviting them into that space to dwell there with you and bringing in the physical, bring in the embodied, you invite them into an embodied state. In that space together you can sometimes sense things that you can name and offer it to the client to check whether it's something that has emerged or named.</p> <p>J47: Yes definitely and what it might start with is me feeling a bit lost with a feeling in me...I am feeling lost and the question is how is the client feeling? And with that begins the process of wondering what they are feeling...is it the same? (66) And then asking them to pay attention to their body and does any part of their body draw their attention? And if it does, rather than saying "Tell me about it" coz often they will say, "Oh it's just some pressure or some pain", coz they don't have the words....But then I might say " If it had a size how big would it be?" and give them suggestions "Is it as big as this bunch of keys? This book? Is it, you know, as big as that box of tissues?" And it forces them - though it no way relates to any of these things it forces them to pay attention to this sensation and come up with a response and then I may say "Does it have a weight? Is it as heavy as these keys?" And then I get them to hold these things. I have stones in</p>	<p><b>66) What it might start with is feeling a bit lost. That starts the process of wondering what they are feeling.</b></p> <p><b>67) Being curious about their process. Being aware of what they are feeling and staying with it.</b></p> <p><b>68) Being openly curious himself.</b></p>
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<p>Back to the concrete-ask again.</p> <p>Wasn't expecting that! Breath again.</p> <p>I feel a profound sense of completion .</p>	<p>the room ...I might put the stones in their hands until it feels as heavy as whatever it is that they are feeling, and then I might say.. erm... "Does it have a colour?" You know, and invite, "Does it have a texture, is it solid, is it fluid?" And all the while...I don't care too much about the answer, and all the while all I am doing is being curious about their process of, of...erm... being aware of what they are feeling and staying with it (67)rather than moving away from it. And this gives them a reason to stay with it and whilst they are staying with it I am being openly curious myself (68) about what it is like and what that feeling is and offering suggestions which facilitates their awareness and attention and I often end up with... if it feels right, with asking them to give it a voice of what would it say "Does it have a voice, a question, what would it ask?" If I said it helps them to articulate the stuff that they don't normally have the vocabulary for, but most importantly it helps them stay with the thing that often is covered in lots of layers or avoided or managed in different ways. And quite often towards the end of that process if we had used things I invite them to say if there is any change and what do they notice now?...If they have had stones in their hands they end up taking out 3/4 of those stones because something has changed, something has lightened just by their own ability to stay with and attend to, change seems to happen...erm... but it revolves around for it to happen. I have to be curious and almost help them in that process of using these kind these comparisons in order to relate to something that there aren't any words for and can't easily being described.</p> <p>R48: And I am really aware that I have invited you to describe something as ineffable as wonder that hasn't got words.</p> <p>J48: Yeah</p> <p>R49 To describe it... and so I am wondering to invite you to describe it. I've a sense of flow, you have beautifully described a sense of flow that is wonder - your experience of wonder...is there a texture? Is there a sense of weight? The sound of wonder that you experience in that place of breath, that you already described...are there any other qualities?</p> <p>J49: Yeah...there are...let me just take a moment....wonder ...[Pause]...what is coming up for me is wonder has the texture, quality of my breath</p>	<p><b>69) Wonder has the texture, quality of breath. It is about breathing in and following the movement of breath into something.</b></p> <p><b>70) When there is an attention on the other there is very much a breathing into the space in-between as well as a breathing within.</b></p> <p><b>71) There is something about the quality and texture of breath and the lightness of breath that seems to shape the experience.</b></p>
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	<p>(69) ...[Pause]... and when I am attending to myself it's about my breathing in and following the movement of my breath into something ...When there is an attention on the other there is very much a breathing into the space in-between as well as there is a breathing into myself. (70) But there is something about the quality and texture of breath and the lightness of breath that seems to shape that experience for me. (71) That is what immediately comes for me... [Pause]...</p> <p>R50: Thank you (Breath out) Shall we end there?</p> <p>J50: Yes</p> <p>R51: Is there anything else you want to say?</p> <p>J51: No.</p> <p>Interview: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015</p> <p>Transcription</p> <p>10<sup>th</sup> January 2015</p>	
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## Appendix 11: Example of Poetic Transcription Process

### Stage 1:

This first stage is similar to the process I undertook, using the guidelines offered by both van Manen (2013) to evoke more strongly the phenomenon of wonder in the written descriptions. Choosing text which carried some quality of punctum for me, where I was stirred during the reading or interview, I stayed close to the words of the participant which I took from anywhere in the written text and

verbatim transcript. In John's case I focussed on his wondering sense of in-dwelling, his felt-sense of the other and the striking image of wonder being like breath. Following Glense (2008) my only alterations to the words I chose were to the tenses, personal pronouns and order of extracts. I thus created a short piece of prose which conveyed more powerfully to me the initial meaning I made from John's experience of wonder immediately after first reading his written description during the interview and following early readings of the transcript/ listening to the audio recording. This is obviously only a partial representation of a much richer and fuller experience but it carries a singular quality and texture of wonder which helped me remember his descriptions of wonder as concrete experiences emerging from particular therapeutic contexts.

Full text compiled from written description and interview data:

First there is the adopting an attitude of wonder. It is kind of like putting myself into the space of wonder or somehow facilitating that, listening out for that space. I have this curiosity "What is going on between us and what is being felt?" Wonder facilitates it by re-directing the space into perhaps what I often imagine is being avoided...that's our vulnerability, our feelings, a felt-sense that you know which underpins a client in the room in the first place. My curiosity is: are they even aware of anything underneath that and what is underneath that and what is it like for them? And if I was to ask them to attend to that feeling rather than to talk about it maybe they can actually connect with what is going on for them in a way which doesn't, which isn't threatening.

Then there comes a moment where I consciously elect to put myself into a certain stance and lose myself in the wonder. I feel lost. The feeling is of actually being taken over by an attunement with my client. I see myself looking at this lady, I notice how I feel. There is a pressure in my chest that is building. A similar pressure is developing behind my eyes. I feel sad and equally don't want to cry. I notice this and wonder if the client feels the same, so I ask her trying not to interrupt the process too. Our vulnerability, our feelings, a felt-sense. Is this me? Is this something I am familiar with or is this different? Is there a reason for this I am aware of? Or is this something that I am new to, and in the moment, and perhaps shares some commonality with the other? I don't know in this moment but it's only by checking in with another that I know really if this is all about me or if this is something reflecting maybe your experience of what is going on. And equally what I don't know necessarily if what is happening for you is actually a reflection of what is going on for me - so I start to co-create something. It feels sort of fluid. It's a cyclical thing. It's almost like a movement between my thoughts and my body. And in my body I am feeling and within a moment of feeling something I then become conscious of feeling it and in that consciousness I am languaging it and when I start to language it I move into that cognitive space again.

There is something that happens with my breathing. The flow of breathing in, the movement of breathing in it's almost like a cursor, you know on your laptop. It's kind of like the flow of movement of my breath positions my awareness, my felt-sense through my body... It's a movement, like a scan up and down and it relates to ...let me see...the movement of my breath ...something like that...there

is a movement to it...it feels sort of fluid, my breath takes my awareness with it, you know. Wonder has the texture, quality of my breath and when I am attending to myself it's about my breathing in and following the movement of my breath into something. When there is an attention on the other there is very much a breathing into the space in-between as well as there is a breathing into myself. But there is something about the quality and texture of breath and the lightness of breath that seems to shape the experience of wonder for me.

## Stage 2

Whilst there is undoubtedly a poetic dimension to the language of the prose descriptions I developed, I decided to take the process a stage further by creating a more formal poetic structure. I use all the words contained in the prose but broke open the sentences to emphasize images and ideas and create a sense of rhythm that captured the movement of the John's wondering or experience of being struck by wonder. This is where I reveal my meaning-making most clearly. In this example use of stanzas emphasize and make clear the process of focussing John used to open up a wondering stance leading to him becoming lost in the movement between self and other before crystalizing in an extended metaphor of wonder as breath. The evocative style of poetry is meant to not simply convey as best I can my early steps in making meanings of my data but is also the most appropriate form I could imagine of invoking a first encounter for the reader with my participants which captured the open, creative, invitational, ineffable quality of the phenomenon they not only described but experienced during our interviews.

See Page 87 for final poetic transcription.

## Appendix 12: Full List of Provisional Themes

<b>Participant</b>	<b>158 Provisional Themes: Expressing a cluster of similar units of</b>
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	<b>meaning from each participant.</b>
<b>John</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is an experience of stepping into the space of wonder</li> <li>2. There is a sense of being in wonder</li> <li>3. Wonder has a quality of feeling lost or losing myself</li> <li>4. Wondering is experienced hesitantly.</li> <li>5. To be in wonder is to be open to vulnerability.</li> <li>6. An aspect of wonder is being curious</li> <li>7. Wonder involves an attunement to Self</li> <li>8. Wonder both facilitates and is experienced as an embodied attunement to the Other.</li> <li>9. Wonder is experienced as a flowing, cyclical movement.</li> <li>10. Wonder has the texture and quality of breath.</li> <li>11. In wonder there is a movement from embodied awareness to consciousness and then cognition.</li> <li>12. Wonder is both a co-created phenomenon and the means by which something new is co-created.</li> <li>13. In wonder there is passion, a deep interest in the Other.</li> <li>14. In wonder there is desire, will, wanting.</li> <li>15. Wonder is a shared experience.</li> <li>16. Wonder is ineffable.</li> <li>17. Wonder exists in the space in-between</li> </ol>
<b>Andreas</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. Being Open <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With Self</li> <li>• With Client</li> </ul> </li> <li>19. With what happens next /No expectation</li> <li>20. No judgement (Aporia)</li> <li>21. Childlike</li> <li>22. Wondering is Different to Questioning.</li> <li>23. Wondering is different in the therapy and after the therapy</li> <li>24. It's a knowledge that is elicited between me and the client because of our relationship</li> <li>25. space creates the conditions to be</li> <li>26. Wondering and Realisation</li> <li>27. At the Limits of Language</li> </ol>

	<p>28. Wonder brings safety.</p> <p>29. It's like taking a deep breath</p>
<b>Mia</b>	<p>30. The possibility of wonder lies at the backdrop of awareness.</p> <p>31. When there is enough space, moments of wonder come up.</p> <p>32. Love provides the proper context for wondering otherwise it would turn the space into voyeurism.</p> <p>33. Wonder comes up when there is a sense of discovery</p> <p>34. In moments of wonder there is a sense of release into something more or deeper in life, where there were aspects closed or hidden there is a sense of opening.</p> <p>35. In wonder there is a sense of reconnecting with grace, with the flow of life.</p> <p>36. In moments of wonder we are put in touch with the humbling realisation that there is so much we don't know.</p>
<b>Jason</b>	<p>37. Wonder at connection</p> <p>38. Wonder is life affirming</p> <p>39. Wonder and healing</p> <p>40. Wonder of therapy</p> <p>41. Wonder is magic and uncanny</p> <p>42. Wonder is uplifting, elevating, ecstasy- a peak experience</p> <p>43. The surprise of wonder.</p> <p>44. Wonder as a pleasant feeling in the chest (heart?)</p> <p>45. Wonder as excess/contained-full/ overwhelming/ too much</p> <p>46. Wonder and boundariedness/ permission/no judgement</p> <p>47. Wonder and gratitude</p> <p>48. Wonder dispels the mundane</p> <p>49. The wonder of therapy- that it works, the theory is real.</p> <p>50. Wonder and love</p> <p>51. Wonder and desire to share</p> <p>52. The intangibility of wonder</p>
<b>Ruben</b>	<p>53. Wonder is an expression of the experience of relatedness</p> <p>54. Its heartfelt and loving</p>



	<p>55. Child-like regression</p> <p>56. A sense of security/ trust</p> <p>57. The Face of The Other</p> <p>58. Stepping into contact with something</p> <p>59. Transference</p> <p>60. The inexplicability of wonder</p> <p>61. Silence</p> <p>62. Acceptance of not knowing.</p> <p>63. Wonder and nothingness</p> <p>64. Wonder is outside Thinking</p> <p>65. A sense of expanding</p> <p>66. Authentic mode</p> <p>67. A tingling feeling</p> <p>68. Deep interest</p> <p>69. A sense of flowing</p> <p>70. Excitement</p> <p>71. Music/harmony</p> <p>72. Energy and the experience of wonder</p> <p>73. Wonder is peace</p> <p>74. Wonder is a special experience</p> <p>75. Wonder as a shift- a surprise, being struck.</p> <p>76. The wonder of existence</p> <p>77. Mood disclosing Being</p> <p>78. It is and opening and opens</p> <p>79. Alertness and being alive</p> <p>80. Being here and now/ present</p> <p>81. An experience of immediate necessity</p> <p>82. Wonder is the opposite of boredom</p> <p>83. Mutuality</p>
<b>Tony</b>	<p>84. Something new/different</p> <p>85. Difficulty in describing the experience of wonder</p> <p>86. Difficulty in understanding</p> <p>87. Tacit knowing</p> <p>88. There was the experience of reciprocity, of spontaneous sharing, of an equalizing of power.</p> <p>89. "Contactfulness"- Separate/Connected/Being met [ I:Thou]</p>

	<p>90. Excited Engagement</p> <p>91. A sense of movement</p> <p>92. Going to a beyond</p> <p>93. The spontaneity of wonder</p> <p>94. Strange/Unusual/Extraordinary/ Magic</p> <p>95. Childlike</p> <p>96. Stuckness and flow</p> <p>97. Blown away in the moment</p> <p>98. Deeper</p> <p>99. Epoché</p> <p>100. This is Interesting</p> <p>101. Curiosity lit up</p> <p>102. Acceptance/ Love/ Trust</p> <p>103. Transcendence</p> <p>104. A flash/ a Pictorial something</p> <p>105. Witness</p> <p>106. Opening</p> <p>107. Silence</p> <p>108. It happened in moments</p>
<b>Dave</b>	<p>109. Component of awe</p> <p>110. Childhood</p> <p>111. Shifted consciousness (Trance/ Magic)</p> <p>112. Narrowing/widening</p> <p>113. Connection/no separation (wider world/ others/ body)</p> <p>114. Open and transparent</p> <p>115. Gateway/portal</p> <p>116. Movement</p> <p>117. Fluidity</p> <p>118. Gentle</p> <p>119. Building</p> <p>120. Arising out of the heart</p> <p>121. Vibration and humming</p>

	<p>122. Excitement</p> <p>123. Rapt attention, astonishment, surprise.</p> <p>124. Aha Moment</p> <p>125. Elusive</p> <p>126. Ineffable</p> <p>127. Being fully alive</p>
<p><b>Nicholas</b></p>	<p>128. Silence</p> <p>129. Spontaneity</p> <p>130. Presence</p> <p>131. Unexpected/ Unintentional/Unwanted</p> <p>132. Meditative thinking</p> <p>133. Can't force it</p> <p>134. It's happening.</p> <p>135. Letting be</p> <p>136. Magic</p> <p>137. Not knowing/ knowing</p> <p>138. Hope/faith</p> <p>139. Agenda-less</p> <p>140. Multi-dimensional</p> <p>141. Pure state</p> <p>142. Difficult to describe</p> <p>143. Openness</p> <p>144. Suspended</p> <p>145. A Shift</p> <p>146. Connection</p> <p>147. Fluidity</p> <p>148. Not a merging</p> <p>149. Becoming permeable</p> <p>150. Vulnerability</p> <p>151. It's like a high</p> <p>152. Lightness</p> <p>153. Buzz</p>

	154. Warm 155. Freshness after a storm/renewal 156. Welcoming 157. Release 158. Serene, calm
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Appendix 13: Clustering into Three Main Themes

Stage One: Clustering of participant themes into forty-three tentative cross-participant themes

<b>Forty-Three Tentative themes</b>	<b>Participants whose</b>
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	<b>experiences expressed theme</b>
"It's not yet trapped in language."	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N
"In wonder I am reconnected with the mysterious."	M; T; D; N
"It was a very strange experience."	M; JA; T
"Wow, it's true it does actually exist."	J; RU; T; N
"The discovery goes outward like to a clearing but deep inside there is a sense of wow."	M
"Lost in wonder."	J; JA ; T; N
"Wonder opens a more profound or deep sense of openness."	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N
"We witnessed each other."	J; R; T
" No-one was trying for anything"	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; N
"It's childlike/ an innocent type of questioning".	J; RU; T; D
"In moments of wonder there is a sense of release into something more in life."	J; M; JA; R; N
"Wonder is spontaneous"	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N
"It always comes up as a surprise"	M; JA; RU; T; D; N

"I am suspended, It is a moment of wonder"	M; RU; N
"In wonder there is a deep I:Thou connection"	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N
"Wonder both facilitates and is experienced as an embodied attunement to the Other"	J; JA; RU; T
" Love-Filled Wondering"	M; JA; RU; T; N
"There is a sense of gratitude".	M; JA
"Trust is important for wonder."	RU; T
"Wonder is an open invitation to my client and myself."	J; T; N
"It is humbling"	M; T
"Just being. A real sense of being actually in the moment"	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N
"In wonder there is deep interest"	J; RU; T
"To be in wonder is to be open to vulnerability"	J; RU; N
" Wonder made us equal"	J; A; M; JA; RU; T
"In wonder we are in a space of new territory, new experience, new phenomena"	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N

"Wonder has the texture and quality of breath".	J; A; N
"When I am in a space of wonder I feel very alive"	JA; RU; T; N
" There is something very renewing about wonder"	JA; RU; T; D; N
"Wonder, it gives you hope and faith in the work."	JA; N
"It's a bit too much".	JA
"Wonder is exciting,"	JA; RU; D
" It was an experience where the boundaries of my body weren't static"	J; JA; RU; D
"It's an uplifting experience".	JA
"It's a high, a little bit ecstatic"	JA; RU; T; N
" Wonder is a feeling of peace"	RU; N
"The shape and quality of the silence has changed."	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N
"It starts as a feeling, a vibration, a humming."	JA; RU; D; N
"It's like the lights go on."	M; JA; T
"There is something quite fluid as a therapist being in wonder."	J; JA; RU; T; D; N

"It's like being transported into another experience quite quickly".	JA; T; D; N
"It feels warm."	J; JA; RU; T; N
"There was the complete unknown and the wonder of the known."	J; A; M; JA; RU; T; D; N

Stage Two:

<b>The Lived experience of Wonder:</b>		
<b>Over-Arching Themes and further refinement of Sub-Themes</b>		
<b>Theme One</b>	<b>Theme Two</b>	<b>Theme Three</b>
<b>The wonder of unknowing: being open</b>	<b>Wondrous connection: the experience of being with.</b>	<b>The fresh revelation of wonder: being renewed</b>
<i>Wonder is ineffable.</i>	<i>An immediate, mutual encounter.</i>	<i>Opening to discovery</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ineffability: It's not yet trapped in language</li> <li>• It was a very strange experience.</li> <li>• In wonder I am reconnected with the mysterious.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wonder made us equal.</li> <li>• To be in wonder is to be open to vulnerability.</li> <li>• Wonder is an open invitation to my client and myself.</li> <li>• Trust is important for wonder.</li> <li>• We witnessed each other.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The discovery goes outward like to a clearing.</li> <li>• Wow! It's true!</li> <li>• It always comes as a surprise</li> <li>• In wonder we are in a space of new territory, new experience, new phenomena</li> </ul>
<i>Unknowing as being-lost.</i>	<i>In wonder separation disappears: attuned presence.</i>	<i>Wonder is renewing.</i>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming lost in wonder.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In wonder there is a deep I-Thou connection.</li> <li>• Wonder is love-filled.</li> <li>• Wonder is an embodied attunement.</li> <li>• In wonder there is deep interest</li> <li>• Wonder has the quality of breath.</li> <li>• Presence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wonder gives you hope and faith in the work.</li> <li>• When I am in wonder I feel very alive.</li> <li>• There is something very renewing about wonder.</li> <li>• A release into something more in life.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Suspended in unknowing: transcendent moments of wonder.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding and waiting: I am suspended in wonder.</li> </ul>		
<p><i>Wondering: letting be into unknowing.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No agendas: No-one was trying for anything.</li> <li>• Childlike, innocent questioning</li> </ul>		

## Appendix 14: Additional Provisional Themes

*Themes relating to how wonder is experienced in terms of embodiment, spatiality and temporality*

- The boundaries of my body weren't static
- It's like the lights go on
- It's like a feeling, a vibration, a humming
- There is something quite fluid as a therapist in wonder
- Wonder feels warm
- Wonder is exciting
- In moments of wonder there is a sense of release.
- Excess: It's a bit too much.
- It's an uplifting experience.
- Wonder is a feeling of peace.
- It's a high, a little bit ecstatic.
- It's like being transported into another experience quite quickly.
- Just a being. A real sense of being actually in the moment.

## Appendix 15: Inner and Outer Space - Comparative Findings

### Research notes made when comparing my study and that of Gallagher *et al.*

August 13<sup>th</sup> 2016

Unlike myself, Gallagher *et al.* investigate two phenomena: awe and wonder and offer working definitions of both. Yet throughout the study they tend to treat them as the same phenomena. This may be a consequence of their definition of awe lacking the association with fear which other researchers see as an essential dimension (Schneider 2004, 2009; Fuller, 2006; Bulkeley, 2005). Their justification for this decision: that none of the astronauts recorded experiences of fear echoes my study where participants also commented that they felt no fear. I suggest that the particular definition of awe given by Gallagher *et al.* moves their understanding of the phenomena closer to that of wonder. This is reflected in their study by the authors generally conflating to the two phenomenon into one designation: "AW". The definition and categorisation of awe provided by Gallagher *et al.* as a "direct and initial feeling when faced with something incomprehensible and sublime" comes close to how I have described existential wonder. Their definition of wonder as "a reflective feeling one has when unable to put things back into a familiar conceptual framework" resonates with what I have described as wondering although there is inevitable slippage between the two.

Reading the study by Gallagher *et al.* evoked a sense of recognition despite the differences in the language we have used to categorise the lived experience of wonder. There is only limited evidence given from the hermeneutic analysis of astronaut writings and phenomenological interviews with simulation participants. But by drawing on experiences of wonder described in the findings and discussion chapters of this report, I suggest that it is possible to see my own participants' experiences in all but two (sense of the sublime and Scale effects) of the thirty-four consensus categories presented by Gallagher *et al.*

<b>Categories identified by Gallagher <i>et al.</i></b>	<b>Resonant findings from my study</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aesthetic appreciation</li></ul>	For participants in my study there was a palpable sense of beauty during an experience of wonder. Tony for example acknowledges that: "[b]eauty is an

	<p>excellent word because there was certainly beauty." Nicholas similarly describes the: "[w]onder of the beauty of that unscripted moment" and "the beauty of this work...still proves we can never get too comfortable, we can always have those moments where we are deeply affected or affected by our client's material."</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawn to phenomenon</li> <li>• Interest</li> <li>• Inspired</li> </ul>	<p>Throughout this study I have described the compelling, irresistible quality of wonder. It is an experience which grabs attention and provokes the wonderer into a deep interest in the Other. As Ruben declares, wonder is: "[t]he antithesis of the mood of boredom." In the sense that wonder is arousing it is inherently inspiring. To experience wonder in my study inspired hope, new possibilities and renewed faith in therapeutic practice.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interoceptive intensive experiences</li> <li>• Change (internal or bodily changes)</li> </ul>	<p>Attention to internal body sensations was a significant aspect of the experience of wonder reported by participants in my study. Just as the astronauts and participants in the research by Gallagher <i>et al.</i> experienced bodily or internal changes, one of the markers of existential wonder for my participants was the changes they registered in their bodies. These were felt-experiences of expansion, fluidity, tingling, warmth and vibration.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connectedness</li> </ul>	<p>A major dimension of wonder I describe in this study is the experience of connection. What is particularly significant when comparing my findings with that of Gallagher <i>et al.</i> is we both emphasised: “[f]eeling connected with something without losing distinction” (Gallagher et.al, p.29). “It wasn't like a merging but erm...there was a lot of complete connection” ( Nicholas)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility ( towards others):</li> </ul>	<p>An understanding of how wonder evokes an ethical approach to being-in-relationship-with-others is a central theme of my study which correlates with the category of responsibility towards others generated by Gallagher <i>et al.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Totality</li> <li>• Unity of external (interrelatedness)</li> <li>• Unity with whole ( feeling of oneness)</li> </ul>	<p>That wonder opened a heightened sense of relatedness lies at the center of my research. A wider, profound sense of totality and oneness identified by Gallagher et al. was also clearly present in the experiences described by my participants. Dave perhaps most powerfully communicated this dimension: “So experiences of wonder, I think, helps us remember our humanity in a universal sense where fragmentation and separation and disconnection, alienation breaks down and becomes unity.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disorientation</li> </ul>	<p>This category from astronauts’ experience</p>

	<p>mapped directly onto the first of the themes emerging from my research: the experience of unknowing. Disorientation correlates well with my participant descriptions of "feeling lost".</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dream-like experience</li> </ul>	<p>The trance-like, altered states of reality which accompanied the lived experience of existential wonder described by my participants resonate with the dream-like category proposed by Gallagher et al. Dave's description makes the connection most clearly: "And what would that be if not a changed state of consciousness you know because we don't walk through life in our normal waking consciousness experiencing the world that way."</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contentment</li> <li>• Joy</li> <li>• Peace</li> <li>• Pleasure</li> <li>• Fulfilment</li> </ul>	<p>One of the remarkable features of the astronaut experiences analysed by Gallagher et al. was the lack of fear. Despite the disorientating, unknowing dimensions of the lived experience of wonder, it was consistently described by all the participants in my study as "a peak experience" which brings happiness, pleasure, joy and a renewal of satisfaction in their work as therapists. Nicholas and Jason both, for example, capture this sense of fulfilment: "God, this is the work we do, this is when it all comes together" (Nicholas). "And part of the wonder is that I am so pleased I am in the profession and I dare say it...I am doing something right to</p>

	have these experiences happening” (Jason).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elation</li> </ul>	Paralleling the feelings of elation reported by astronauts, participants across my study when in the throes of existential wonder described feeling uplifted, ecstatic, a sense of high. Jason perhaps captures this aspect of the experience most clearly: “It’s a little bit ecstatic moving out of something into something quite.... like a peak experience...it’s quite an elevating experience.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overwhelmed</li> </ul>	In its existential dimension, the lived experience of wonder was overwhelming or excessive. As a moment of “peak experience” it existed just within the holding capacities of participants.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional</li> </ul>	Whether wonder is more properly described as an emotion, a feeling, an attitude or passion that it is experienced as a heightened state of arousal is present across all the written descriptions and participant interviews.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience-hungry</li> </ul>	Given the intensely pleasurable and transformative nature of wonder, the participants in my study, as reported by Gallagher et al., were keen to experience it more in their therapeutic practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exteroceptive intensive experiences</li> </ul>	That wonder is experienced intensely fills

	<p>my participant written accounts and interviews. One particularly resonant example of exteroceptive overload was in relation to sound. The wonder in space is silent. In a similar way, the wonder described by the therapists in my study and experienced in the dialogical space of our interviews was frequently characterised by a sense of stillness, silence and calm.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home</li> </ul>	<p>The sense of feeling at home described by astronauts finds its equivalence in my study in the repeated descriptions of how when participants dwell in wonder their experience of a heightened sense of presence and connection with Being.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Floating</li> </ul>	<p>The experience of floating as both a bodily sensation of weightlessness and of floating in the void are quite specific to the lived experience of space travel. Nevertheless, this quality was also present in the descriptions given by participants when they spoke of feelings of expansion, of being “uplifted”, fluidity and flow. That the lived experience of wonder in space-travel was communicated through the concept of floating in the void is evoked in my study by participants descriptions of dwelling in unknowing. Given the theme of natality which emerged in my study, this image of floating in the void also finds expression in my study through the potent images of the foetus, pregnancy and birth.</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspectival (spatial) change</li> <li>• Perspectival shift (internal change of moral values)</li> </ul>	<p>That the experience of wonder evokes transformation was a key theme emerging from my study. There were bodily changes but also dramatic spatial changes as the distance between self and other in a moment of existential wonder collapsed. There were also examples of shifts in values as wonder opened therapists to a greater sense of love for their clients and ways of working that emphasised genuine acceptance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual appreciation:</li> </ul>	<p>It is in its aspect of wondering that the cognitive dimension of the phenomenon revealed itself in my study. Participants described their curiosity, sense of discovery and excitement when a moment of wonder disclosed the “truth” of theoretical aspects of therapeutic practice.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nostalgia.</li> </ul>	<p>Whilst participants in my study did not directly express a strong sense of nostalgia in their descriptions of wonder there for many of them childhood innocence and memories conveyed an important quality of the phenomenon. “I felt wonder, like a child regaining his own belief in magic.” (Dave)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poetic Expression</li> </ul>	<p>That wonder exists on the limits of language was a key finding from the neurophenomenological study. Participants of both studies found themselves needing to draw on metaphorical language to sufficiently evoke their experiences.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Surprise</li></ul>	<p>The experience of wonder is one of being surprised. My study is threaded with descriptions of how my participants were always struck by the unexpectedness of its arrival into consciousness.</p>
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## Appendix 16: Extracts from Research Journal- Encountering the Literature

*February 18th 2013*

*I have spent the last few weeks dwelling- in –wonder and I can certainly say it's been an unsettling experience. How could I have thought it could be otherwise? I think this is the first time in a research project I have felt as much uncertainty as excitement. I have found myself touching into article after article and resisting a deeper engagement with the material. At first I was giving myself a hard time at not "getting on with the work properly" but I have decided to look at what I have been doing differently. I have been touching into the vastness of the material- the philosophers, the poets, the neuroscientists, the mystics and feeling awe-struck by the magnitude. Whilst I will need to establish some structure in my journey right now I am relishing feeling a bit disorientated /lost. So part of me is keeping a light touch on the various readings I am making unsettling as this is to my sense of how I usually work. This will be different.*

*Reflections on this reflection? Looking back now on these notes I can see themes emerging from my being in wonder which are then described by my participants: being lost; I am simply here being present to my process:*

*April 14<sup>th</sup> 2013*

*This feels like an interesting time in my research. I want to read ...am starting to see more clearly themes and connections but don't want to have too much fore-knowledge that it will cloud my analysis. Having said that I have started to download books on transcendence and this seems a fruitful direction to hold onto. There is of course Levinas's work on transcendence to explore in more detail... just how does transcendence fit with wonder???? Need to think about this at some point.*

*Just skimmed Steen Halling's book: Intimacy, Transcendence and Psychology. There is, what seems to me a significant first chapter: "Seeing the Other as if for the first time." Steen asks for written descriptions (: -D) and interviews then pulls out themes. The first of the themes is surprise and wonder. This is definitely an aspect of my own LED which I hadn't articulated but should look out for. He also in this section makes the connection to Buber's I-Thou what does he say about how it relates to wonder and surprise? This is so exciting!!*

## Appendix 17: Extracts from Research Journal - Becoming Wonder-Struck

The following extract was written as stream of consciousness whilst suddenly struck with wonder mid-way through reading the text of my interview with Ruben directly after transcribing it.

21<sup>st</sup> Sept 2015

*I am fully inserted into a space of wonder- I feel a sense of expansion, that my physical body is liquid that I am soft on the edges- not merging but in contact beyond physical boundaries... that there is a movement towards without fear. It's peaceful, calm, soft, gentle but powerful. I am confident of getting whatever has to be got- I am available, I am vibrating in a whole body sense. I have a strange feeling of being alert and have a sensory expansion that is almost fuzzy yet I am almost laser like in my attention- things seem closer and yet distant at the same time...perspective is out... it's not normal, I don't feel normal, it's almost dizzying but I am curiously feeling still and poised at the same time. I feel transfixed and excited by what might emerge...yes there is this expectation that in this heightened receptivity some insight will happen but I am utterly not trying, I am effortless, more effortless than at other times... trust in what is happening . This is out of the ordinary yet I am utterly ordinary – still me but a hyper me- me with sudden access to extra ordinary, extra special powers in the capacity to be with something- to SEE it without my usual filters. What is it? My filters are off- I am available but not just a tool or vessel, I am fully present – this is how to be, to be alive, to be alive, to feel the potential of each timeless moment. And there is an added sense of intensity because I know that it probably will stop soon. I can stay with it but it will go so it feels more special, more precious. When I tune in there is a heightening of temperature, like all my cells are vibrating, like stars releasing light and energy. It's like a profound meditation but it's available to see and know I am much more than ordinary. I feel no sense of separation with the universe, I am connected. I am part of all that is vibrating and still. I am vibrating and still and available. Available. Strong and present – No violence- can't even write the word without it feeling a disturbance. No violence. No separation. It's coming from my body- my body is vibrating and letting me know this. The harmony of my cells- flow within and flowing towards, letting flow towards me. Maintaining Integrity yet open to be touched. Unafraid, unafraid. Clear, rapt, fascinated. Awake and alive still and vibration open and available. Poised. Harmony. Aware of its temporality- this won't last. To be present while it does. Don't waste the opportunity. A GIFT a gift. URGE TO GIVE. LET IT FLOW FROM ME , AROUND ME...DON'T STOP IT, DON'T CONTROL OR CONTAIN IT, LET IT BE , LET IT BE. Be. This IS being in existence. Dasein. I am here and there, a being but in flow of my place. I feel placed, present, situated, here and simultaneously there in the sense that I feel expanded. That is it, I am here and there in my expanded flowing state of being. I*

*am open, undefended, available. Without judgement- even to write that word feels violent, letting the words come without doubting them as I am in writing this. Acceptance. Love, acceptance, love, trust. This feels truth. Scary to write that as it feels such an altered state of consciousness. No, it feels like a true state of consciousness. This is how it is to be alive and peaceful, accepting, available, loving. Undefended yet strongly present. Childlike trust Innocence yet wise/ sage at the same time. Grounded in wisdom and yet open and available for whatever knowledge or experience is being given to me. Unknown possibilities. Like a child who has no idea what is in store but lets it come in innocence until they are hurt. That is it- I am free in wonder of my hurt, I LET GO of the suffering and feel what it is like to be a body/psyche not fragmented by fear, pain, hurt but is whole and available able to meet another human and resonate with this possibility . How amazing is this – to be given a moment of pure being and presence with another and resonance- to open myself in this undefended, whole, vibrational space to another. The I-Thou. This is available to me and thee. I am separate and connected to you. VIBRATION. All cells vibrating.*

*22nd Sept 2015*

*Reading back through this now the experience has passed I feel almost embarrassed at its euphoric, open intensity. Yet I know it captures exactly what happened. I am aware of how much resonance there is with Ruben's description of his experience: trust, love, vibration, Beingness, flow, energy. But this felt very much my experience. Something in his words triggered me to have this experience of wonder fully and directly. I address a "you" but now I have no idea who this "you" refers to. Perhaps the you is Ruben? All I know is I simply did not feel alone.*