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Therapeutic challenges of multi-being

Kenneth J. Gergen[a]

This paper emerges from an attempt to shift the locus of understanding human action from the individual to relationship. In doing so we come to see persons as multi-beings, that is, as constituted within multiple relationships from which they emerge with multiple, incoherent, and often conflicting potentials. Therapy, in this context, becomes a colla-borative relationship with the aim of transforming the client's broader relational network. In this view, schooling in a singular practice of therapy artificially limits the therapist's potential, and thus the possible outcomes of the client–therapist relationship. Invited, then, is a reflective eclecti-cism, in which the myriad potentials of both the therapist and client are considered in tandem. This view is illustrated by contrasting three relational conditions in which clients find themselves, each of which invites a different form of self-expression from the therapist.

I am reviewing the first draft of Fred's dissertation. On one page I find myself scribbling in the margin, 'this is inconsistent with the previous chapter'; on other pages I write, 'incoherent', 'colloquial', or 'awkward phrasing'. I also have my moments of congratulation: 'elegant', 'good point', or 'nicely prepared'. I proceed with little reflection. I am simply participating in a tradition that aims to educate individuals to become clear and coherent in their thinking. Yet there is a certain irony in my comments to Fred. As I sit here writing this paper, I am filled with doubts and turmoil. I am aware that for much that I wish to say, I also carry a critical voice. At each sentence I am confronted with other ways of putting things, and dozens of criteria for judging. It is a major effort to suppress all this nattering, but I am in peril if I do not. Specifically, if I do share the full cacophony with you, the reader, you will soon respond as I did to Fred. 'This is totally incoherent!'

The view of the ideal person as a coherent unity has a long tradition in the West.

It is evident in the Christian tradition, with its emphasis on the purity of the soul, and the clear divide between good and evil. The

The Taos Institute

philosopher Stephen Toulmin (2001) traces the emphasis on logical coherence to the rise of Modernism, and particularly the influence of the Cartesian view of reason as the centre of human action. Good reasoning is clear and logically consistent, ideally approximating mathematics. The maturing individual should thus aspire to a coherent way of thinking about the world, one that integrates disparate facts into a single, overarching theory. These same values are also inscribed in clinical practice. George Kelly's widely acclaimed *Psychology of personal constructs* asserts that all people attempt to build conceptual systems that are internally consistent. Prescott Lecky (1973) argued that the 'normally' functioning human being strives for consistency in all aspects of his life. Mental suffering is equated with blockage of consistency-striving. It is no accident that the profession's labels for mental illness include schizoid thinking, bipolarity, dissociation and multiple personality disorder.

In what follows, I wish to first explore the possibility of an alternative to the traditional conception of the whole and coherent person. It is a view that emerges from my attempt in recent years to develop a relational conception of the person. Such a view replaces the traditional emphasis on independent, autonomous agents with a vision of individuals as fundamentally intertwined. A full account of this vision is contained in my forthcoming volume, *All my Relations* (Gergen, in press). This is not the context for a full account on this vision. However, its concern with what I call multi-being raises particularly challenging issues relevant to therapeutic practice. It is to a range of such challenges that final attention will be drawn.

The self as multi-being

Although internal conflict has long been the hallmark of psychodynamic theory, such theory is also lodged in a view of biologically based motivation. The nature of conflict is thus viewed as inherent in the individual, and is limited by one's view of biological drives. Further, such conflict is viewed as debilitating. In developing a relational account of human action, all these assumptions are challenged. In my view, behind the façade of unity, coherence and wholeness lies an oppositional world of discord. However, it is a world of enormous potential, gaining daily in dimension. Consider its genesis. As we engage in relationships, both significant and superficial, we are continuously absorbing potentials for action. Every relationship provides three points of origin for these potentials. First, others' actions

serve as *models* for what is possible. As we observe others in action they fill our consciousness, thus providing a first step towards incorporating their actions into our own repertoire. This process, variously called imitation, modelling or identification by social scientists, is often credited as the fundamental engine of socialization. It is exemplified in the therapeutic work of Karl Tomm (1998) and Richard Schwartz (1995). Yet, the traditional view of modelling does not take us far enough. Within any relationship, we also *become somebody*. That is, we come to play a certain part within the relationship itself. With my mother I come into being as a child; with my children I come into being as a parent, and so on. Each relationship will bring me into being as a certain sort of person, and the actions that I acquire will enter the repository of potentials for future use.

Multi-being is also constituted by a third residue of relationship, the interactive scenarios that we perform together. When we learn to dance, we acquire the ability to move our bodies in the prescribed way; we also watch our partners, and possibly could imitate them as well. Of equal importance, however, I learn the coordinated activity of the dance itself, how it goes when I move in this direction, or you move in that. In the same way, I learn what it is to participate in the give and take of an argument, the coordinated action of making love, or scenarios of emotion. Harry Stack Sullivan's (1968) concept of 'me-you' patterns is relevant here. In sum, our participation in relational process leaves us with potentials to be the other, to be a certain kind of self, and a form of self/other choreography. From these three sources, we emerge with enormous possibilities for being.

There are a number of important consequences of this view. Among the most prominent is obviously its contrast with the traditional vision of the unified and independent self. The ideal of an internally integrated, harmonious and coherent mind is replaced by a view of the person as fundamentally disorderly and inconsistent. The individualist view of individuals as independent agents is also replaced by a vision of the person as fully embedded in relationship. It is only from one's immersion in relationship that the very semblance of separate identities emerges. The well-ordered and independent mind is no longer the goal of maturity, but a sign of constricted relations. For the multi-being, coherence and integration may be valued, but only within particular relationships. Rather, one may celebrate the myriad potentials for effective relationships.

It also follows from this vision of multi-being that for anything we hold as reasonable or good, we may very well harbour the potential

for its opposite. For every way of being we embrace, we are also
capable of alien activity. From a relational standpoint, every good
liberal also knows very well how to engage in hate talk. Every religious
fundamentalist feels the attractions of sin; every adult can be childish;
every responsible official has the know-how for corruption; every
heterosexual can entertain the possibility of homosexuality. That we
sustain any particular way of life is not because of deep character or
genetic birthmark, but because of the press of ongoing relationships.

    This is also to say that the stable worlds in which we seem to live are
quite fragile. In our daily relationships we encounter only partial
persons, fragments that we mistakenly presume to be whole person-
alities. Stability and coherence are generated in our local agreements.
But these agreements are not binding, and disruptions can occur at
any moment. I am not proposing that social life is thus a grand
charade, in which we are all wearing masks to suit the occasion. The
metaphor of the mask is misleading, as it suggests there is a 'real self'
to be revealed behind the guise. For the multi-being, there is no inside
vs. outside; there is only continuous participation in relationship. Any
moment of compelling authenticity may give way to a sense of
compromise.

Picturing multi-being

To appreciate this vision of multi-being a visual metaphor may be
useful. In Figure 1 below, various relationships in a person's life are
each represented by an oval. From every relationship there emerge
residues or resources in the form of potential actions (e.g. intellig-
ibilities, emotional expressions, choreographed movements), any of
which or in combination may be activated in the moment. The person
is essentially constituted, then, by a multiplicity of relationships. Some
relations leave residues that are well practised, while others leave little
but whispers of possibility. The well-practised residues are immedi-
ately to hand, such as the way one speaks to casual friends. Often we
call these habits. They feel, at the moment, to be authentic, a reflection
of the true self. Those less practised may seem – for a time – to be
sham or play-acting. All potentials may also be viewed as skills, but
others should treat them as skills. People engaged in a rich range of
relationships, such as the cosmopolite, may carry an enormous range
of potentials; the sheltered or the villager may have fewer potentials.
We are equipped, then, to enter any relationship with myriad
potentials for being.

Figure 1

As Figure 1 suggests, these relational residues resemble the wing of a butterfly. This wing enables one to soar in many directions. However, like the butterfly, two wings are required for flight. In Figure 2, we add the wing. As we see, in any relationship, there are

Figure 2

virtually infinite possibilities for coordination. Failure is also possible. It is this very condition in which the therapist and client find themselves together.

Multi-being and reflective eclecticism

The implications of multi-being for therapeutic practice are many and complex. At this point I wish only to open the door to exploration. In particular, I wish to call attention to the challenge to the tradition of univocal or single-school therapy that has long pervaded the profession. From Freud to the present there is a strong tendency for practitioners to employ a particular form of therapy (e.g. psychodynamic, cognitive behavioural, systemic, narrative, brief) regardless of the circumstances of the client. It is true that many therapists are more eclectic in their orientation, essentially adapting their approach to the context at hand. In taking account of multi-being we find reason to press further, towards what may be viewed as a *reflective* eclecticism. The condition of multi-being asks us to reflect on the kinds of

coordinated actions required to bring about change in the character of this client's life conditions. If therapist and client are to take flight in their relationship, there should be deliberation on the particular combination of feathers best suited for the journey. In what follows I wish to contrast three conditions.

Progressive isolation

I have become intrigued in recent years with what appears to be an increasingly pervasive social pattern, that of progressive isolation. By this I mean an individual's circular, self-sustaining trajectory in which a minor form of deviance and doubt invites others' avoidance, which in turn triggers further doubt and deviation, with the result of once again increasing social rejection. Consider: As a result of our multi-being, virtually all of us dwell at the borders of the unacceptable. Most of us labour with questions of being too fat or too thin, too short or too tall, too quick or too slow, too talkative or too silent, too ambitious or too lazy, too emotional or too rational, and so on. Typically, however, we find ways of escaping criticism and not stepping on too many toes. Most importantly we overcome doubt and sustain our sense of being 'OK' through our relation with others. We draw continued nurturance from the subtle affirmations of daily interchange. Energetic greetings, the unselfconscious sharing of conversation, congenial laughter, making plans together and so on all affirm one's membership inside the walls of the acceptable. For most, these commonplace scenarios are sufficient; for others, they are not.

In the common hustle-bustle of life we tend to avoid anyone who is too loud, aggressive, silent, incoherent, critical, slow, unpredictable or otherwise bothersome. In the individualist tradition, we understand that we must take care of the self first, that everyone is responsible for his or her own behaviour, and that the deviant stands in the way of our progress. Confrontation with deviance can also be unpleasant and time consuming; avoidance is the best option. Yet, if we happen to be the offensive one, we are left floating in a sea of uncertainty. 'Have I done something wrong; I was only doing my best; I am only reasonable; why is that so bad; what is it about me?' Such doubts can first give way to rejecting others ('I don't care what they think') and then to avoiding them ('They don't like me, so why hang out with them?' 'They don't appreciate me, so what's the point?'). At the same time, avoidance of contact functions as a further barrier to affirmation. Self-questioning intensifies, often leading to uncontrollable rumination.

To combat the whirl of self-defeating suspicions, one may draw from the repertoire of multi-being: 'I am a person of especially deep feelings, and they are superficial.' 'I am just smarter . . . more creative . . . more insightful.' Again affirmation is lacking, opening the way to actions appropriate to the private reality but nowhere else. First there are actions that confirm the negative visions: cutting one's body, binge eating, starving oneself. Alcohol and drug addiction are especially invited, as they both punish the individual while simultaneously allowing moments of ecstatic forgetting. Most problematic are actions that punish those responsible for the ejection. One may, for example, adopt more extreme behaviours, understanding full well that others will be anxious, frightened or irritated. Disrupting conventions yields a satisfying revenge. Offensive clothing, slovenly or menacing actions, muttering to oneself are all options. As others' avoidance is further increased, there are no limits to one's imagination. And this may include inclinations to eliminate the arrogant abusers. Here we have an incubator for extreme actions, such as stalking, paedophilia and school massacres.

Recent decades have multiplied the potential for progressive ejection. This is so for two reasons, both related to twentieth-century technologies. On the one hand, technologies of communication contribute to the multiplication of *oughts*. We are bombarded, for example, with advertisements regarding the proper body shape, clothing styles, arrangement of the teeth, texture of the hair and so on. The media inform us of what is 'in' in the way of music, books, restaurants, film and wine. Everywhere we encounter the 'top 100', 'the top ten' and 'number one'. Rapidly the standards are multiplied and proliferated, so 'every savvy person' knows the rules of accept-ability on the club scene, at the beach, in the classroom and so on. When oughts are multiplied, so is deviance.

Further, there is a dwindling number of people who can provide the needed affirmation. Twentieth-century technologies have quick-ened the pace of life. With increased capacities to move about the globe – both physically and electronically – we find ourselves with more opportunities, more invitations, more information to process, more open vistas, and more things that we 'must do'. Most of us find ourselves continuously under pressure – so many demands, so little time. Work on the job is extended into the home; home life is interrupted by travel requirements, lessons, meetings and children's activities. Extended time together is reduced to 'quality time', and relationships in depth are replaced by an extended

and superficial network of acquaintances. Under these conditions it is difficult to find others to trust with one's secret doubts and yearnings; it is equally difficult to locate others who have the time to listen, probe and understand. There is simply no time for deviants (Gergen, 2001).

In my view, therapists from virtually any school – from psycho-analysis to Buddhist meditation – can provide important resources for enabling clients to escape the Charybdis of isolated self-torment. This is so because all can affirm the individual as a valid participant in the social world as opposed to treating him or her with disbelief or disregard. All may establish a relationship of care, thus contributing to the special advantage of therapy over other forms of responding to deviance. At the same time, there are great variations in how much of the client's private wandering will be affirmed and legitimated within the conversation. In many respects, Carl Rogers' (1995) non-directive orientation sets a standard for practices that are maximally affirming. For Rogers, all self-doubts, private fantasies or hidden loathings are invitations to the therapist's unconditional regard. As many contem-porary therapists would say, Rogers was *fully present* to his clients. Yet Rogers was also committed to his own particular theory of dysfunction and cure. Essentially he knew the source and cure for clients' problems before they entered the room. While he listened fully and affirmingly, his responses were virtually scripted before the client spoke the first word.

In this respect I am drawn to Harlene Anderson's (1997) proposals for bracketing the demands of theory in favour of full attention to the client's accounts. It is not simply that the 'knowing' therapist may shape the client's account so that it confirms the therapist's pre-established theory. Strong theoretical commitments also encourage selective listening. Especially for the diagnostically oriented therapist, there is the danger of questions that position the therapist as the judge of the client's sanity. As one of Anderson's clients reported, when his previous therapist asked him 'Is this an ashtray?', he was thrown into a panic. He needed to talk about his fears, and not to be placed under evaluation. Anderson proposes, instead, a form of curious and responsive listening in which one treats the client's story as a trustworthy and legitimate reality. One responds 'into' the client's story world, accepting the language, vocabulary and metaphors. The client's reports are not treated as an indication of something 'behind' the words – a hidden, unconscious problem, for example, but as one might the words of a close friend. Therapy, in this sense, is a

collaborative relationship in which responsibility is shared for the outcome (see Anderson and Gehart, 2007).

Suspending realities

Let us now consider a contrasting condition. For many anguished people, the affirming voice of a therapist may remove plaguing doubts and restore a sense of ontological security. With potentials restored, they may also move more effectively in the extended dances of relationship. Yet, for many therapeutic clients, it is not a sense of spinning into a vortex of doubt that is troubling; rather it is an altogether compelling reality that crushes them in its grip. We are not dealing here with people who writhe in ambiguity, but with those locked within debilitating patterns of relationship from which there is no apparent exit.

How do people become so inflexibly committed to a self-defeating way of being? Let us place this question in the context of multi-being. As outlined earlier, normal life equips us with innumerable potentials for relating. However, in this case we confront people whose patterns of action are narrowly constrained. Rich potentials remain unrealized. We often view such persons as problematic personalities: 'Jack is aggressive; Jill is a chronic depressive.' This is to mistake the self of the moment for the potentials in waiting.

If our potentials for action originate in relationship, so must we turn to relationship to understand the origins of constriction. There are two major forces at work in such cases. The first may be located in ongoing relations in which the person is immersed, and the second in the past history of relationship. Each requires special therapeutic attention. With respect to ongoing relations, it is useful to consider cross-time patterns of collaborative action. There are the common patterns, such as playing games, gossiping and exchanging gifts. There are also patterns that are degenerative in their effects on the participants. Among the most common are arguing, exchanging criticism and mutual blaming. Participants move slowly towards the demise of their relationship. To be sure, in all scenarios, certain potentials are suppressed. Learning how to play one game profi-ciently may mean being unskilled in others. However, in the case of degenerative scenarios, the suppression is more lethal. In generative scenarios, the door is always open to creative change. The exchange of affirmation sets a context that is congenial to expanding expression. However, in degenerative scenarios, the other becomes an alien. One

does not wish to explore, because the other is rejected. Thus, couples play games in which they subtly undermine each other, they isolate each other, or lure each other into mutual rage. Exploration of alternatives is difficult, and this includes acts of affirmation. As communication specialists Pearce and Cronen (1982) point out, many people form patterns of relating they know are harmful to their relationship. They have bitter fights, engage in mutual blame and so on. However, they are so well practised in these routines that they become 'just natural'. In effect, they become self-sustaining.

Most therapies offer resources for challenging the client's life world. This is so in large part because most therapies are theory driven. That is, the therapist enters with a set of understandings shared within his or her professional enclave. These understandings will seldom duplicate the discourse used by the client. Thus, whenever the therapist asks a question dictated by his or her theoretical background, it will typically function to dislodge the presented reality of the client. The client wants to talk about family problems but the humanist therapist asks about his feelings; the client talks about how everyone is laughing at her, and the cognitive therapist asks her if they could they be laughing at something else; the client talks about problems of sexual perversion and the psychoanalyst shifts the discussion to childhood experiences. All such questions move towards dislodging the taken for granted (Spence, 1984). At the same time, they lure the client into an alternative world that may or may not be relevant to existing conditions.

Significantly more flexible in opening up spaces for new flights of relationship are the discursively oriented practices of therapy. Classic is the work of the Milan School and the development of *circular questioning* (Becvar and Becvar, 1999). Such questioning is often successful in shifting the family's understanding of 'the problem' from the traditional orientation to 'troubled individuals' to troubled relationships. Within this new space of understanding, many possibilities may unfold. Distinctly devoted to expanding the range of possibilities are the practices of the reflecting team**.** Discussions provoked by a reflecting team may stimulate a new range of dialogues for the participants, while simultaneously generating an appreciation for multiple realities. Narrative therapy is especially sensitive to locating evidence within the life history of the client that may be used as a scaffold for building an alternative to the dominating reality (White, 2007). In effect, the therapist enables the client to locate forgotten feathers with which to fly.

Relinquishing private relations

So far we have focused on constricted patterns of action that derive from ongoing relations in the present, and have touched on several practices designed to reduce the power of these restrictions. However, as multi-beings we also carry with us the residues of the past. Most of these residues are valuable resources, available to enrich the present. At the same time, some inheritances from past relationships are strangulating. They become so hardened that we are insensitive to the changing situation; they are knee-jerk responses that disrupt and destroy ongoing relations. For example, one may harbour an obdurate vision of his or her inferiority, failure or undesirability; or one may be overtaken by an unstinting sense of injustice, jealousy or insufferable others. Other people find the world all too dangerous, threatening, or replete with forces beyond their control. Here we are also dealing with people whose relational partners may find themselves in despair. Nothing they do seems to invite change. They want their wafer-thin daughter to eat more, their mate to be less sullen, their father to be less aggressive and so on. How, then, do we account for the continuation of such inflexible patterns of being?

Being locked in the past is to remain bound in some form of relationship. It is to participate in a scenario that privately sustains itself. The reasons for sustaining such debilitating scenarios may be many. Often they sustain themselves because they remain unfinished; a drama has unfolded and one returns continuously in search of a satisfactory conclusion. For example, one may have been rejected without a satisfactory reason, unjustly attacked without an opportunity to retaliate, or sexually abused without any reconciliation. The story is suspended; its awful drama holds one in its grip. A common form of the 'unfinished story' leaves us with a residue of self-recrimination. Here is the 'negative voice', a voice that reminds them all too often that they are unworthy, unlovable or inferior (Claude-Pierre, 1998). Typically this is the voice of authority (e.g. parents, teachers, older siblings). In effect, these are people to whom one could never offer an adequate reply, a refusal or a counter-attack. The voice remains unanswered and unanswerable.

In the case of these repetitive scenarios, the challenge for the therapist may be formidable. In the most extreme cases, the whirring of the private world may reject all who would attempt to enter. The resentment, hostility or sense of self-righteousness may function as a fortress. No one can truly understand, no one is sufficiently worthy,

and those who attempt to be so may seem condescending or manip-
ulative. How is one to enter the conversation? The Puerto Rican
therapist, Edgardo Morales, tells the story of his early days as a
therapist. He was given a highly difficult case to treat, a young woman
with a history of drugs and antisocial behaviour. Her stormy disposi-
tion had led to her hospitalization. When she was brought to his office,
she sat sullenly before him, her stony face set off with dagger eyes.
Edgardo began with a congenial greeting, and gently outlined how
talking together might be helpful to her. She stared silently. After
more false starts, Edgardo recalled that she had owned a white cat.
Abandoning the therapeutic chatter, he asked about the cat. Although
the stare was never broken, Edgardo did notice a slight movement of
her mouth, as if she were almost ready to speak. With this, Edgardo
proceeded to tell her that he, too, owned a white cat. But, he said, his
cat was very naughty. Edgardo then sat himself behind his desk and
began to tell the girl that at night when he was working at his desk, the
cat became jealous. He wanted attention. Then, role-playing the cat,
Edgardo climbed on top of the desk, and with a loud '*Meow*', leaped
with all fours on to the desk top. The patient suddenly screamed out,
'You are crazy!' Edgardo responded, 'Yes, but I get paid for it.' The
girl burst into laughter, and with that, an engaging and productive
conversation began.

A less dramatic, but highly innovative means of disrupting
these self-sustaining scenarios was developed by New York therapist
Peggy Penn (2007). If the offending other cannot be addressed
in person, she asked, are there not other ways of 'finishing old
business'? Specifically, Penn made extensive use of letter writing
to generate dialogue with the unavailable participant in the debilitat-
ing relationship. Consider a woman who has suffered abuse from a
now-deceased stepfather. She cannot rid herself of the humiliating
experience; normal sexual relations are now beyond her grasp. Penn
might have her compose a letter to her stepfather. There she could
quietly and articulately spell out the full range of her feelings,
her anger, anguish, self-blame, and possibly even her love. With the
private conversation now out in the open, Penn can be brought more
fully into the conversation. The private scenario is now open to
another conversational partner. However, the process does not ne-
cessarily terminate at this point. Rather, Penn might then invite the
woman to compose a letter in which she takes the part of the
stepfather. What can she imagine her stepfather saying to her? How
would he explain his actions; what would he be feeling? Now the

scenario approaches conclusion and, with Penn as a collaborator, its grip is released

In my view, Buddhist practices now represent an enormously important addition to the therapist's resources. Speaking directly to the challenge of private scenarios is a Buddhist practice called Shikanho (Koschikawa *et al.*, 2006). In one variation, clients are asked to think of the unpleasant occurrence that unsettles them, and to summon forth the feelings that it evoked. Once the image is in focus, they are asked to envision the situation without making any evaluations or judgements. They are to allow the scenario to play itself out without judging, for example, that it was humiliating or disastrous. After suspending judgement of the scenario, the clients are challenged with a new task: imagine looking at the situation from various angles of vision. How would it appear from above or below, from near or far? With the help of the therapist, clients move through these angles of vision every two seconds. After thirty seconds, however, they are allowed pause for thirty seconds to take a deep breath before continuing. Through this form of concentration, the unpleasant occurrence ceases to be commanding. One may approach the memory as 'something that happened', but with its significance now optional. It is neither good nor bad in itself; vantage point is everything.

Expanding horizons

As we find, when viewed in terms of multi-being, differing client histories may present the therapist with particular challenges in terms of productive collaboration. The client who is plagued by a private dialogue of doubt may require an affirming partner; the client who is locked within a debilitating process of relationship may require reconstructive conversations; and one who is bound within relational process long past may challenge the therapist to locate means of entering the circle and rewriting history. I have focused on these three conditions not as an attempt to be inclusive, but to open up discussion on the variations in the modes of therapeutic relationship that may be required for productive interchange.

It would be useful to expand the range of such situations, and to extend discussion of reflective eclecticism. For example, because of the security derived from sustaining a well-practised way of being, an individual may become increasingly 'de-skilled'. One may hone practices such as anger or argumentation over time, becoming

increasingly proficient in their use. However, as reliance is continuously placed on these forms of being, there may be a loss in flexibility. One may simply lack the skill to respond to frustration other than with anger, or to disagreement other than with attack. Under these conditions the therapeutic relationship may best become one of student to a teacher of skills. Here the usual dance of question and answer may have to be abandoned in favour of a form of relationship in which the client metaphorically learns how to fly.

Or, in the case of couples, there is the frequent occurrence of one participant living out a way of being that is unacceptable to the relational reality they have built together. Love affairs, sexual deviance and crime are among the most common candidates. The challenge here is to locate means of crossing the borders of meaning in such a way that the binding reality is not destroyed. The skills of a mediator may be demanded of the therapist. For many couples, there is also the ironic threat of long-standing harmony. As potentials are suppressed and eroded over time, the vitality of the relationship may expire. Here the therapist may become a guide into the imaginary. As multi-beings, clients and therapists have before them an enormous range of possible trajectories. As suggested here, reflection on their form and function may be highly productive.

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